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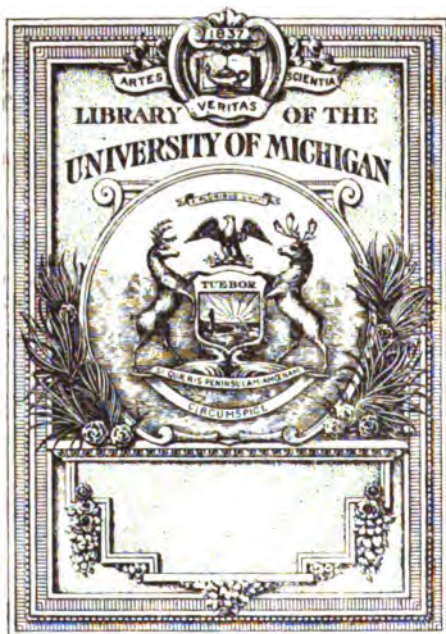
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THE HOPE OF THE HOUSE



The Hope of the House

By
Agnes and Egerton Castle



Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

ST. JOHN.

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To our Brother
MAJOR M. J. SWEETMAN
2nd Worcestershire Regiment

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PROLOGUE

Home of my sire. . . .!

THE HOPE OF THE HOUSE

PROLOGUE

Owen of Treowen

I

YOUNG OWEN leaned against the rough gate and gazed out across the landscape. His heart was sorrowful, and the beauty of the prospect pierced it with an almost physical pain.

Just a week ago, up at Cambridge, life had opened out before him with a vision as fair and untroubled as that sweep of country upon which his eyes now rested: sweet with the promise of spring; sun-gilt, shadowed with but the most fleeting clouds—clouds of youth, that have more light than gloom in them. Now death had stricken his house. Ruin menaced. A burden of care and responsibility, over-heavy for his twenty years, had been flung upon his shoulders.

He had come out here to think, to grapple with a problem which was not solvable, whichever way one looked at it, save at some grievous cost. He had to take a decision vitally concerning not only his future, but that of his only brother, still a child. When—how long ago it seemed!—his tutor had broken to him the sudden passing away of his kindly, easy-going father, he had thought, with juvenile exaggeration, that he had touched the extreme of sorrow. Now he realised,

and was ashamed of himself for the knowledge, that the side issues of the disaster contained far greater elements of misfortune.

The words that Trevor Williams, his father's executor and trusted agent, had said to him were ringing over and over again in his ears: "There is nothing for it; you'll have to sell Treowen."

Sell Treowen—sell Treowen! Nothing for it but to sell Treowen!

His gaze wandered over the spring scene. He could see a great way, for Treowen stood upon a height. Just beneath him spread the oaks in golden budding foliage; farther away the fields; then closely massed woodlands; beyond again a dazzling stretch of river where none knew better than he how the trout leaped. Look which way he would, all was Treowen, the soil with which his race was so identified that Owen of Treowen had become words inseparable. To the country-side, indeed, that an Owen should reign at Treowen was as a fact of Nature itself, as inevitable as that the river should come tumbling down the slopes of Llanskirred and run in beauty, fertilising the valley; that Pen-y-fal should raise its cone head against the blue, a landmark to all the county, catching the rose of sunset, the gold of dawn.

And the same hour that made him master bade him renounce his inheritance. His was the hand that was to cut Owen from Treowen, part the children from the land that had nurtured them.

"You could get along quite nicely, once the drag of the place was off your wheels," had said the counsellor to comfort; "pay off the mortgages and have quite a decent income."

"And if I don't sell?" That was all he had been able to reply.

The agent had shrugged his shoulders, his glance

compassionating. Explanations had begun again. David had not been able to listen.

He had escaped as soon as he could, longing to get out of the house, with its unfamiliar, dreadful atmosphere: reek of funeral refreshments, acrid smell of black-dyed garments, sickly sweetness of flowers; and through all some indescribable breath of mortality which chilled him to the marrow.

How could he find himself in this nightmare? It seemed no more real to him here, out in the keen fresh air, with the unchanging dear loveliness of the home lands about him, than that hour—was it a year ago or only four days—when he had stood in his tutor's room overlooking the old court and heard the tidings of his bereavement. He had expected reprimand, from the sudden summons; and when the reverend and learned don, looking at him uncomfortably, had abruptly demanded to know whether he had recently heard from home, and if his father had seemed in good health, David had stared amazed before replying cheerfully: "Awfully fit, thank you."

"Indeed." Mr. Jacomb White had risen and gone over to the window, where, David remembered, a fly was buzzing lustily up and down in the sunshine. "Indeed, you surprise me!" Here the tutor had looked over his shoulder and with a jerk had shot out the announcement: "Because I'm sorry to say I've just had a telegram—and he's dead."

David gave a forlorn laugh as he recalled the episode. There had not been an inflection in the dry voice. How silent it had become all at once in the shabby, pleasant, book-lined room, except for the fly!

It was from that moment that everything had become unreal. The hurried journey, the arrival in the house of death; that yellow ivory mask on the pillow;

the candle-lit room, with its unnatural emptiness and stillness, and the horrid secret, feverish bustle in the rest of the house; little Johnny's return from school, scared and silent; and then the long, hateful day of pomp. The throng which had pressed about him; the innumerable times that his hand had been wrung; the iterated condolences, the questions that he had answered vaguely, mechanically, as if sleep-walking; the way to the church, interminable with its perpetual interchange of coffin-bearers; the sound of the Welsh chants; the intoning above the open pit, and the rattle of the first earth clods falling on the wood. Then the lunch, he in his father's place at the head of the table; the subdued munching and whispering of the hungry men; and, at the end of all, Trevor Williams drawing him into his father's study, enjoining on him to sell Treowen.

The light was growing golden; long shadows began to stretch from the woodland across the plain. The creaming ripples of the Usk were turning amber, and the point of Pen-y-fal glowed against the warming sky. Sell Treowen?—Never!

The decision was made. David turned away from the fence. Up to then his mind had been tormentedly fighting against a calamity fiercely unacknowledged as inevitable, yet dimly felt to be so. Now it was different. He knew that, whatever difficult paths he might be forced along, that way of surrender, hideously comfortable, should not be his. How he was to manage he did not know; at what complete self-sacrifice he could not yet measure; but the determination was defined. It ran clean cut, like a knife stroke, across the tangle of uncertainty. He would hold Treowen. He cared not what he might have to suffer in the struggle; it would be not for himself, but for his children. Then facts rose up and struck at him again. How could

he hope to marry? How could he bring the tender ideal of his pure, youthful dreams into a life that must be a literal conflict — severe, penurious, endless?

"Well, then, if not for my children," he said sternly to himself, "for Johnny's."

He was walking aimlessly through the oak woods homewards. Already the primroses were clustering in their thick, deep green leaves. As yet the bluebell spears were only visible to the careful seeker. A thousand delicately pungent scents were in the air; the songs of the birds were flung around and about, across and across the woods, while, somewhere on the edge of it, the low, rich gurgle of a solitary blackbird poured itself forth like some magic fountain of melodious water. Whatever happened, however hard it might be, however lonely his life, he would always have these things for his own.

A little figure appeared, running, at the end of the path in front of him, stopped, and then advanced demurely. Little John looked very small and frail in his new suit of black.

II

JOHNNY halted beside his big brother, and shot a side-long glance at him. He was unlike David and the Owen race, taking after the young mother who had died in giving him birth. There was over twelve years between them, and since the little boy had gone to school a certain formality had crept into their intercourse. He had become an entity rather apart, with alien thoughts and interests of his own, no longer a toy and a petted thing, but a small personality, inclined to be cold in his manner, surveying the world with critical eyes; with certain ideas and standards before

which David, simple of mind and impulsive, found himself at times nonplussed.

The child had shed no tears over his bereavement, but no one looking at the small, set face could think that there was any want of feeling at the back of so much self-control.

David's dark countenance softened as he looked down at him. He held out his hand, and the other slipped his little chill fingers into it. A moment or two they walked together in silence, and then Johnny spoke :

"Nanny says father is in heaven."

David started and clutched the slender hand closer. With a sense of unpardonable remissness on his own side he realised that he had never thought to follow the poor soul in its great quest. All his preoccupation had been purely material; the grief for his father a dull, physical ache.

"Oh, yes, of course," he exclaimed hurriedly, feeling the lustrous gaze question him. "Of course. Dear father! You didn't think anything else, Johnny?"

"It seemed queer," the boy went on, and his voice was delicately precise; "I couldn't feel, somehow, as if it was father at all—what I saw lying there . . . you know?"

David pressed the little hand. He did know.

"And Nanny says he's in heaven. It seems queer, somehow. Father was always so—so jokey."

David was silent. The child had indicated with unerring instinct an unbearable aspect of the tragedy—the death of a light-minded man; the passing of a spirit that heaven and hell, it seemed, must alike reject for reason of its insignificance!

"Nanny says," the clear voice piped on after a pause, "that father's got to heaven on the shoulders of the poor."

David stopped and looked down into the upraised face. He had been holding converse within himself to the increase of that sore ache. The kindly, luxurious, easy-tempered man that his father had been—what harm had he ever done anyone? he had asked. And the answer had come, swift and cruel: He had left ruin to his own race. Johnny had unconsciously rebuked the harshness of this thought, and in the rebuke was balm.

His affection for his father had been deep; it had been impossible not to love the handsome, generous, pleasant, foolish parent, but it had not been filial; it could not be accompanied with veneration, hardly even with respect. Rather, indeed, had it been protective, anxious. There had been sudden agony in the image of the futile, bewildered soul, homeless in great eternity.

Johnny was anxious to explain further. He had an evident fear at the back of his anxiety, a desire for further reassurance.

"It's in the Bible," he said. "Nanny got it down and read it to me—the big old Bible she keeps at the top of the chest of drawers." His mouth suddenly quivered downwards at the corners. David's sad face frightened him. "It is true if it's in the Bible," he repeated.

The way the child fought against the rising tears, his determined self-control, went to David's heart. He sat down on the jutting root of a tree and drew the little boy between his knees.

"Yes, old man, yes. Tell me all about it."

"It's written in it: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom.' Oh, David, you know. 'I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in.'" Johnny broke off, swallowed hard, and beat his brother's shoulder softly with his hands. "Father

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did all that, oh, every day! He was always giving, wasn't he? 'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren——' That's what it says, you know. That does mean the poor. And Nanny says she doesn't know if father ever visited him in prison. But that does not matter, because of all the rest—David!"

"Oh, Johnny, yes. Don't cry, little Johnny. Dear father! God's very merciful. There was the poor."

He held the little figure to his breast, and his own tears fell. With the wet cheek pressed against his, he became aware that the easy, natural affection he had always felt for his brother was something immeasurably deep-rooted, unspeakably sacred. This precious life was now in his charge. He must be father and brother all in one.

In a little while, hand in hand again, they resumed their way to the house. David was essentially an outdoor man. Nature appealed to him, not with æsthetic flattery of the senses, but as a definite necessity. As a schoolboy the confinement of the class-room had been penal, and he had counted the days and hours to the holidays. At the University life had been pleasant enough, because he could carry on very much the kind of existence he led at home. But always the yearning for home was in his blood.

Now, as he went through the oak wood, Johnny hanging on his arm, the wonderful beauty about him was something felt, not analysed. The shafts of mellow sunlight caught the grey boles of the gnarled trees, painted them gold, and flamed in the young leafage. Delicate mists were rising. The place looked etherealised. The serenity of the evening was like a benediction.

They emerged from the wood. A sweep of shorn

turf rolled upwards to a terrace wall, flower bordered; and above, the house rose against the lambent sky.

It was a wonderful house. David had often heard it said there was not another like it in the kingdom, which meant, indeed, there was not another like it in the world. It was of singular height, four-storeyed, and gabled on all sides, built of a creamy grey stone, with chiselled decorations of wreaths and ribbons. The Owen of Merry Monarch days had expended the whole marriage portion of his city wife upon the embellishment of his antique dwelling, but much remained unaltered from a far earlier date. The door under the narrow porch was still fastened by the oak beam that ran into the depth of the wall; and hewn in the stone passage that led into the banqueting hall there still remained the pilgrims' benches, even the oaken platters, in which were served of yore the doles of hospitality, hung upon their rusted chains.

The man who now lay in such poor and narrow quarters had revelled in the rich antiquity, the noble panelled spaces of his ancestral home. Much of the chain of difficulty and debt which was to hamper the son's progress through the world had been forged from the æsthetic appreciation and artistic accuracy with which his father had made of Treowen the archæological gem of the country.

As big David and little Johnny ascended the terrace steps, still hand in hand, the child suddenly pressed against his elder and said, in that contained small voice that covered the inner shudders :

"Don't let us go in that way, David."

The other cast a glance across the trampled sward. It was still flower-strewn, where the school children had cast spring blossoms. The space suddenly became peopled, to his mind, with the black crowd, advancing, filing, halting—the sable-marshalled pomp of death.

Yes, Johnny was right. The great hall would also be full of hauntings, tangible and intangible, of the morning's dreadful business. He was glad enough to take another way, and sheered to the left, obeying the drag of the clinging hand. They went through the century-old yew hedge towards the stable-yard. Here stood the oldest portions of the old buildings. The immense buttressed walls were flanked on one side by the immemorial tower of Owen, which had kept watch over the valley in pre-Conquest days.

A bent black-clad figure emerged slowly from the archway leading into the yard as they drew near.

"It's Mr. Price," said Johnny.

David halted involuntarily, in some dismay. Conversation was the last thing he desired. But this old farmer was one of the chief tenants of the estate, and the new squire could not pass him by.

"And, indeed, Mr. Owen, sir, and little master too, it is very glad I am to have a word with you. Though, indeed, Mr. Owen, there's none can truly call himself glad of anything in so sorrowful a day for Treowen. *Ach y fi*, we have lost a good friend. Your father, Mr. Owen, was a kindly man, sir—a kindly man to all. And proud we were of him for a noble gentleman. And you're very young, Mr. Owen, sir, to have the great position. But the Lord would not have put the power into your hand had He not known you'd uphold it as it should be upheld whatever for the honour of the race. And it's what we've all been saying, I'm sure, Mr. Owen. You'll do no less than your worthy and respected father, for it's the true Owen of Treowen that the Lord has made you, indeed. Yes, yes."

He was a little old man, bent nearly double by a life of relentless toil. His gnarled hands, half-hidden by the over-long sleeves of his best black coat, clutched the top of the stout stick on which he supported him-

self. He looked up at his new landlord with eyes that had still an incredible fire in the midst of the withered face. A ragged grey beard spread upon his shrunken chest. Silent, his lips still moved with the senile working of toothless jaws. But if the carcass was well-nigh worn out, the spirit that inhabited it was unimpaired; an old man's spirit, strong in wisdom, strong in courage. Upon an impulse for which he could not account, David cried :

"Mr. Williams says I must sell Treowen."

Little Johnny started and quivered at his brother's side, but there was scarce a change in the wrinkled face of the farmer.

"Dear, to be sure, that's bad hearing, Mr. Owen; and, indeed, it's what I've heard said about and around from many this melancholy day! He was a great gentleman, whatever, your worthy father; but free with his money, Mr. David, over-free with his money. Tut, tut! It'll be a bitter thing for those that have lived under Treowen, father and son, these hundreds of years. I'd be fain not to see it for myself. Ah, true! A free hand makes an empty coffer. Mr. Owen was free, a very free gentleman. To be sure, now, that'll be a hard thing for Owen and Treowen to be parted. But what would a young gentleman like you be doing, with the money gone? It's not like as if you was a farmer's son, whatever, as could make the land give back what the purse lacks. The Lord works, so to speak, with a balance, Mr. David. To be born a gentleman of a great race—'tis a grand thing, no doubt 'tis; but there's compensation in being born lower down whiles. Indeed, yes, yes. There was me. Take me, Mr. Owen, when my poor father went his way. To be sure, and it's not for me to be casting a stone on his tomb, and him in the churchyard at Gwentlyon this sixty years; but he was a heavy drinker, my father. And when

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my poor mother and I came to look at things, well now, to be sure, that's what they said to us, same as what they said to you. 'You'll have to sell, stock and crop, and give up the farm.' We that had held it, father and son, from the days beyond the harrying of Cromwell! Aye, indeed!"

The old man stopped, shook his head, chuckled and became engrossed in far reminiscences. The ragged ends of his beard wagged with the silent movement of his jaws. David had been listening intently, his eyes on the ground. With parted lips the little boy turned his gaze with absorbed interest from one to the other. It was he who broke the pause.

"Will you please tell me what you did then, Mr. Price?"

The farmer returned to present matters, with a benignant smile at the prettily spoken request.

"Ah, look you, little master, being, as I just now be telling Mr. Owen here, one of the workers born, I laughed in the neighbours' faces. 'Give up the farm,' I says; 'that's a good joke,' I says. 'Never, and, indeed, not while I have hands to work with. So they'll give me time, I'll do the work of two.' And sheep are very paying stock, little Master John. But, indeed, the man that would make his money out of the kind beasts, he must see after them for himself night and early. Indeed, yes, yes. You remember what the Book says, Mr. David, about the hireling and the shepherd? The Good Shepherd is He that giveth His life for the flock. The hireling will flee. Aye, and indeed! And yet again: the sheep know the voice of the shepherd. That is the way with it, whatever. He knew. But there's no life for a gentleman born. Think of it, little master. Out all the cold night in the lambing season. Aye, and if the snow come 'twill be a fight, likely—a fight, so to speak,

between life and death itself. It's not ever the hireling will have the heart for it. No, indeed."

The clear child voice brought the rambling wisdom back to the question at issue.

"And they didn't make you sell, Mr. Price?"

The old man gave his contented laugh.

"Why, indeed, no, no, not they, Master Johnny, and many is the hard word they gave me for a fool! And many is the hard year we did be having, my poor mother and I, and, to be sure, there were times when she was the worst of all against me, poor soul! I couldn't let her keep as much as a bit of a wench to mop for her whatever. But times were never so bad that I went back in my heart upon the word I had given myself. I kept Pentril and I have Pentril. And my grandson will have Pentril and be a richer man than ever I was——" He broke off, and shot a sudden, anxious glance at his landlord. There came a quaver in his tones. "And, indeed, Mr. Williams having renewed the lease for nine-and-ninety years, no later than Lady Day these five years gone, there's none would have the right to interfere with us Prices at Pentril, to be sure, the law being the law—be it even as they sell Treowen for you?"

David lifted his downcast glance.

"Treowen shall not be sold," he said, in a slow, dreamy voice.

"Oh, Davy—oh, Davy," cried his brother, in tones vibrant with joy.

David's dark eyes flashed. A fugitive smile came to his lips. Releasing his hand from Johnny's clasp, he spread it and its fellow before him and looked down at them—strong, clear-cut, sunburnt, the hands of a sportsman!

Then he turned to the old farmer:

"Good-bye, Mr. Price; I am glad to have met you."

III

"I'M in a position, I repeat," said the agent cheerfully, "to tell you that you can get a fancy price for Treowen. Your poor father laughed when I came to him with Mr. Powell-Wannemaker's offer. Well, your poor father was never one to hear reason. He wouldn't face the position at all. But as it turns out, it's all the better for you now. The chap—calls himself American, bit of a German Jew, I fancy; well, that's neither here nor there—has set his heart upon it; says there's been an alliance between the Powells and the Owens of Treowen—time of the Wars of the Roses, he said." Mr. Williams gave a sudden dry chuckle. "You may trust me to keep him to the mark now. I'll not let him abate a jot whatever."

The speaker leaned forward and began to check, on one square finger after another, each advantageous item as he defined it.

"He'll take the place as a whole, money down. You'll be able to pay off all mortgages right away, start clear of debt. Clear of debt, young man, and have a comfortable little fortune besides—something like eighty thousand to invest! What do you say to that? Why, with what comes to you both out of your mother's fortune and the pickings here and there, you and my little friend Master Johnny could start life with something nearer three thousand a year than two. Say two thousand a year for yourself! Two thousand a year and no encumbrance! Come, come, my dear young sir," said Mr. Williams, somewhat impatiently, as the listener's attitude of silence and passivity became ever more pronounced, "there is no good in looking at the black side of things. Many would consider you a very fortunate young man, let me tell you. Good heavens,

isn't everybody selling nowadays? Look about you. Three out of every four of the old estates in the county have passed out of the original hands. You'll always be Owen, you know, if not of Treowen." His voice dropped suddenly, and his gesticulating hands fell on his knees. "Owen you remain, you'll always be Owen," he repeated, with an effort; "that's a birthright no turn of the wheel can rob you of."

Still David did not reply.

They were together in what was called the oak parlour, the wonderful panelled room that had been his father's study. One of the peculiarities of the ancient dwelling upon which Powell-Wannemaker had cast his coveting eye was its freedom from the box-like gloom so generally associated with the panel-and-beam period. The ceiling here, beautifully decorated in plaster relief, was singularly lofty, and the high, wide Tudor-mullioned window, recessed on a dais, let in a flood of sunset light. The rosy rays caught David's olive cheek on one side and stained it red, also the hand that held his cold pipe.

He looked up at last, and fixed his adviser with a long, pondering gaze.

"I shall remain Owen of Treowen. I'm not going to sell."

"But, my dear boy—— Pooh, pooh, pooh!"

Mr. Williams jumped to his feet. Small, thick-set, he was a typical Welshman, with dark, hawk-like features and vivacious eyes, that looked all the more vividly black by contrast with a whitening crop of hair. "But, my dear Mr. Owen!"

He puffed incredulity, reprobation, annoyance. Here had he been, for the second time that day, elaborately explaining the one course that lay open to the heir of so many entanglements—a course unexpectedly made easy. Was he to be countered by this nonsense?

Sentimental nonsense it was, unworthy of a reasonable being. Then his irate glance softened. A hard case, truly! Owen and Treowen—none knew better than Trevor Williams, born and bred in the Vale of Llangethly, what it must mean to part the two. But, nowadays, when things might have been so much worse, and——

"It isn't as if there was any other way out. Indeed, my dear young gentleman, have I not been over it, and through it, and round it a thousand times? Have I not struggled and battled? Has not my hair grown grey over it? Who knows the facts if I don't? You'll have to sell or be sold. And God knows, if you let it come to that, if you'd have a farthing left apiece, you and the little boy, whatever! You can't keep Mr. Powell-Wannemaker waiting too long, mind you. He's got an eye on St. Colums yonder by the coast. Aye, indeed, and Lord Penpergan ready to sell, too, and quite willing to allow him"—again Mr. Williams was shaken by one of his cackling laughs—"to claim a graft on the family tree."

"He'd better fix it up with Lord Penpergan, then."

"Pshaw! You're mad, Mr. David. You don't know what you're talking about."

"I know quite well."

"And when you've paid the interest on the mortgage, the interest to the bank and the upkeep—the estate roofs and walls alone, young man, take a terrible lot of money in the year—and the mortgagees down sharp if there's as much as a slate loose or a gate off the hinges, what's left you for house and stable and garden and preserves?"

His voice rang out almost in a scream. To say truth, his own heart was very sore, and opposition exasperated the pain.

David got up in his turn. He went over and stood

beneath the armored stone hood of the chimney, and absently knocked his still tightly filled pipe over the embers.

"I thought if I sold Llantilly and let them put up the factory father was so angry about, I'd get something for that, shouldn't I?" He wheeled round as he spoke, and put the question sharply.

"You'd get—you'd get something, of course. Pshaw! What of that? What would it amount to? Thirty thousand won't clear you——"

"It will help to clear me."

"Well, then, how are you better off? What will it leave you to live on? It isn't a bit of use, you can't keep up the place. You couldn't live like a gentleman here."

"I don't mean to live like a gentleman. But I mean to live here."

Mr. Williams rolled his eyes; he opened his mouth and shut it again two or three times without being able to find a word.

"I mean to farm."

"Good God—a gentleman farmer! We all know what that costs! And, indeed, you could not hit upon a quicker way of losing your money—the money you haven't got, mind you!"

"I said a farmer; I did not say a gentleman farmer. I shall cut the gentleman."

"Good God!" said Mr. Williams again.

"I shall keep no more servants than a farmer need keep. I shall have no stables except what a farmer may have. I shall put down the shooting. I shall be a sheep farmer. It pays. I may breed horses later. I know that pays too. I shall work myself, as the farmer does. I shall be no gentleman farmer. I am going to be a hard-working man—at Treowen."

"Good God," said Mr. Williams for the third time.

He tottered to his seat, sank helplessly on it, and, rolling his black eyes up at his young patron, once more dubbed him mad.

David remained unmoved. The elder man's excitement fell of itself. He broke off in the middle of an ejaculation and stared at his companion's set face. The country-town lawyer, agent of a great estate, accustomed to deal with many different classes of humanity, becomes fairly well versed in the reading of character, and Trevor Williams had a naturally acute intelligence. He recognised suddenly that all opposition was as futile as the beating of the Usk waters against the stones of its bridge.

"I may as well spare my breath," he said at last. "You've got that much of your poor father, if little else—his obstinacy. Well, you know where it led him."

"You shall see where it leads me," answered David gently.

When he smiled, as he did now, his face became singularly charming. A second ago the adviser had added to his remark about obstinacy the inward disparagement: "He has certainly not inherited his father's looks." Now he found himself thinking in involuntary admiration: "As handsome a lad as ever Treowen has bred!"

IV

LADY CELIA MORGAN sat in the chair of state in the Hall of Treowen, and regarded David with a mixed expression on her charming face; frank curiosity was there intermingled with a grudging admiration and general discontent. That was nothing; Lady Celia was always discontented, only the degree varied between the humorous (when she was in a good temper) and

the overbearing (when she happened to be seriously ruffled).

She was a very handsome woman, with eyes the colour of amber and wonderful hair several shades deeper. She was the daughter of a duke, the wife of the richest man in the county, and little John's god-mother.

Johnny himself was leaning against the chair, his grave gaze fixed on her face. He was very fond of her for two reasons: first, because she was beautiful, and he loved beautiful things; secondly, because she was a great lady, not only by right, but by bearing, and his aristocratic instincts were already highly pronounced.

David stood in his favourite attitude against the chimney-piece. His eyebrows were drawn together with a faint expression of annoyance. It was not that any argument his visitor used carried more conviction than those of Mr. Williams; but he found it harder to maintain his point against this fair, domineering friend. Her reasoning, too, was not of the kind that admits of logical discussion.

"Sell Treowen! I never heard anythin' so silly!" Lady Celia had a deep, musical, drawling voice. She invariably dropped her final 'g's,' and she had a singular trick of pronunciation by which the letter a became *aw*; it added to the softness of her speech. . .

"Sell Treowen! Of course you couldn't sell Treowen. Why should you? To pay off mortgages? Nobody ever pays off mortgages. Fawther never did. That's why Devonport had to marry an heiress." A gleam came into her brooding, golden eye. "Oh dear, how stupid men are! The idea of you and Mr. Williams workin' yourselves up into this state! You'll marry an heiress, David dear. You can hold on two

or three years, can't you? Lots of men marry as young as that. Then you'll marry an heiress. Any heiress. She'll jump at you. There are plenty about, really." Her beautiful orbs became clouded again. The note of cheerful inspiration left her voice. "Of course I shall mind it dreadfully myself. I always meant you to marry my little Peg."

"Peg!" exclaimed David, amused out of the sense of weariness and futility that was closing about him. "Why, Lady Celia, she's not nine yet."

"You'd have been just the right age for her," pursued Lady Celia in her discontented way. "What's a man worth before he's thirty-four? I meant to bring her up quite Welsh. I like Treowen. And you would have been just the sort of kind, quiet, huntin' husband that makes a girl happy."

"I'll marry Peg," said Johnny unexpectedly, "if David can't."

His brother broke into loud laughter, but Johnny's godmother turned a serious, considering gaze upon him.

"You're only a second son, Johnny dawlin'," she said then with perfect gravity. "I wanted Treowen for Margaret. And, of course, if David is goin' to give up the University and turn himself into a labourin' man, clippin' the sheep and slicin' turnips for them, he'll grow horrid and coarse and stupid by the time Margaret's old enough."

"It's the only way to keep Treowen," patiently said its young master.

"Nonsense. A nice girl with twenty thousand a year, or even ten——"

"Oh, please don't let us joke about that any more."

"It isn't a joke. I never was more in earnest in my life."

"Ah, then, I'm in earnest too. Never, never! I won't sell Treowen, but I won't sell myself either."

The high-born lady lifted her gaze thoughtfully upon David, and he looked back at her very steadily.

"Well, I always liked you, David, and I think it rather hard on me." The plaintive note predominated. "Little Peggy would have been so safe. Now she'll marry some horrid kind of young Guardsman with a past." She caught herself up and glanced at her godson; and, starting upon a new grievance, "Are you," she asked, "going to turn Johnny here into a shepherd boy?"

Johnny flushed to the roots of his fair hair. He shot a quick look at his brother, the look of a child struck, too proud to cry out. There came a heavy silence. David's troubled gaze fell upon the small figure, while thought chased thought with giddy rapidity in his mind. How handsome the little fellow was! What an air of breeding, of distinction, was his! Frail, slender, lovely, marked by Nature as one set apart and away from the sordid toil of life, he was indeed the fine and delicate flower of a proud race. Was Johnny to be brought down with the world too? To "cut" the gentleman and turn into a clodhopper with his elder? Yet, how could it be otherwise? To keep Johnny at his present expensive school, to send him on later to Eton, would mean a charge of at least three hundred a year, increasing in proportion as army or university days came for him. Even if this outlay could be afforded, would it not be the utmost folly to bring the lad up in such fashion only in the end to set him out in life upon some miserable pittance?

The sensible course, doubtless the kinder too, was to find a good, inexpensive, practical school for the boy, where he would be duly educated and prepared for the struggle he, too, would have to make in the

world. But, as David looked, all sense of prudence, all the laborious conclusions of reason were swept away in a rush of feeling. Whatever might happen in the future, he would not have Johnny sacrificed now. He would not condemn this sensitive child to the torment of the second-class school: part him from his natural associations and have him brought up—to earn his bread. If this meant harder work for himself here at Treowen, well, then, he would work harder. If there were further renunciations involved in it—so long as only he had to make them he would not shrink. The one thing he could never bring himself to endure was to see that look on Johnny's face again.

Lady Celia, with parted lips, gazing at her young host, saw a kind of illumination come into his countenance as he contemplated his little brother. The tears started to her eyes.

"Johnny shall not be a shepherd boy," said David, and smiled. He said this to Johnny himself, then he turned to Lady Celia. "Perhaps you'll let him marry Peggy in the end, for he might, after all, have Treowen."

Lady Celia was startled.

"I don't want to marry your heiress, you see. And I should not, certainly, want to marry a dairymaid. So it's likely that I may not marry at all. Johnny here would have Treowen then. I hope you wouldn't mind him for a son-in-law, even if he were a Guardsman, would you?"

"Oh, what nonsense you are talkin'," cried Lady Celia petulantly. The tears ran down her cheeks. She caught Johnny into her arms and kissed him.

"Everythin's very horrid," she said, as she got up to go, "except Johnny"—then she paused, her voice took a note of genuine emotion, "and you, David," she added.

"David, I wouldn't mind——"

Lady Celia had gone, and the two were alone. Johnny touched his brother's hand timidly. "I'd like, indeed, I'd like to help you. And I wouldn't mind being poor, and going to another school—nor the sheep."

"Look here," said the elder, and there was a wholesome breeziness in his voice, "you've just got to let me manage for you. It's all right, old man," he went on quickly, "you'll see what fine things we'll do yet, you and I!"

That night, coming up late, after long cogitation over his father's papers, an impulse made David enter his little brother's bedroom. To his surprise he found a light there. Old Nanny was sitting at the foot of the bed, behind the big scrapwork screen, dating from the previous generation. A single candle was on the table beside her, it flung a monstrous shadow of her capped head across wall and ceiling. The Bible lay open on her knee—she was a great reader of the Word—she got up and put her finger to her lips as David entered.

"Is Johnny not well?" he whispered anxiously.

No, Johnny was not ill, she reassured him, but indeed, the poor child had been fretted and overdone. She had had all the trouble in life to get him off to sleep. She picked up a sheet of paper from the table and handed it to David. It was scrawled with calculations in an elaborate round hand, beginning with: "If I sell my pony," and ending up with, "a handsome possible income from rabbits."

"He has a very conscientious nature whatever," said the old woman. Johnny, the last of three generations of nurslings, was her darling. "And, indeed, he's taken it into his head that it's too much money he'll be costing you."

David's mouth twitched. He stuffed the paper into his pocket and went round the screen. In the dim light he could just distinguish the delicate face flushed with recent weeping pressed against the pillow, the hand which lay outflung on the silken eiderdown: a hand singularly unlike that of the usual little boy—pale, long-fingered and slender. The conviction forced upon David a few hours before renewed itself now with increased emphasis. Johnny was not born to battle with the world. It would have to be made easy for him. Not only in the present but in the future too.

David had been going into figures also, poring over accounts downstairs, and he had come up despondent. Mr. Williams had assured him that he could not save Treowen; he was beginning to find out for himself the appalling nature of the struggle that lay before him in carrying out his resolve to do so. Now he was deliberately charging himself with another burden.

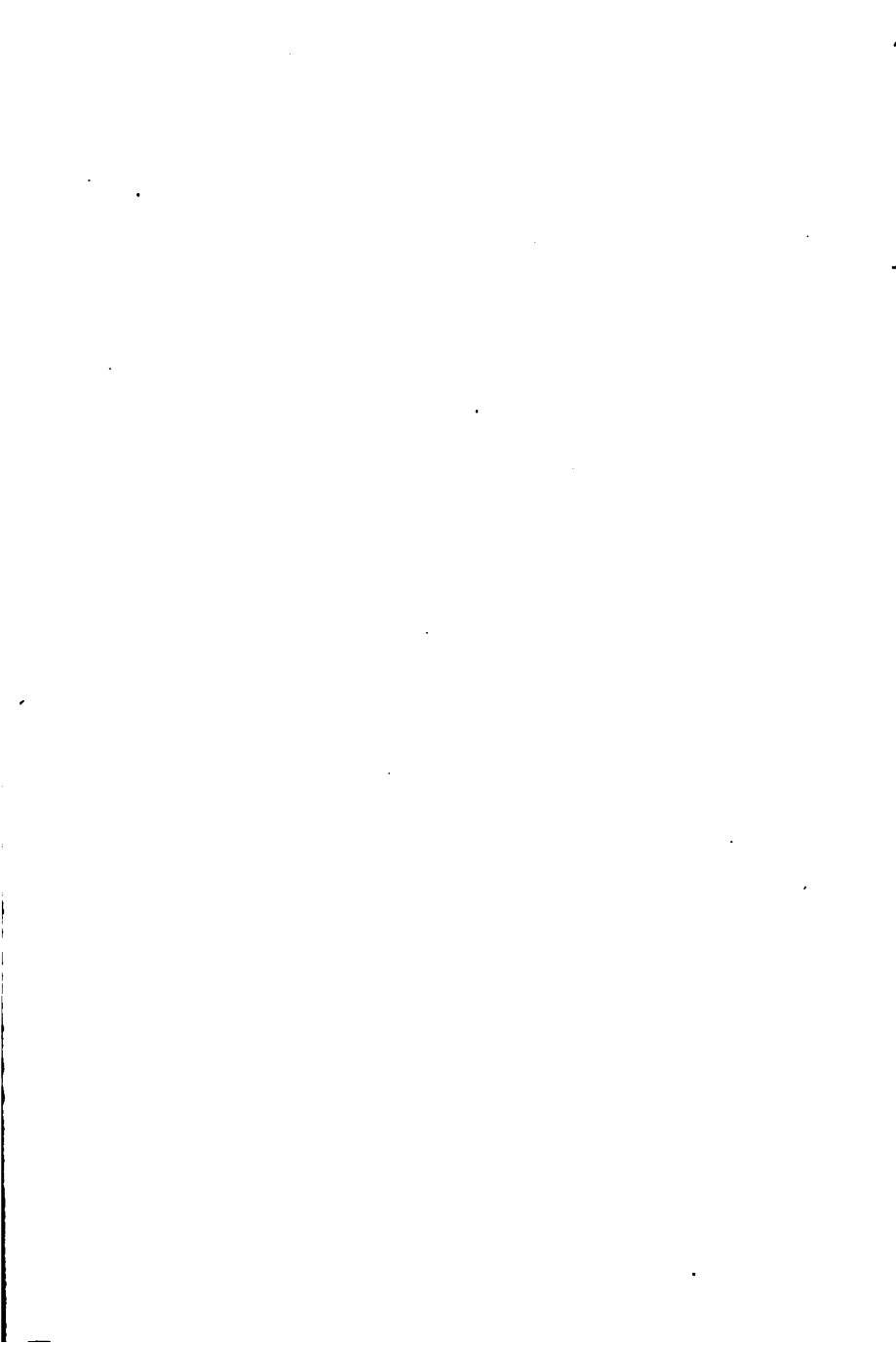
It was not enough to save Treowen, it must be saved for Johnny. It was a double purpose he would have in life; with every moment it became more closely one. It was no longer Treowen and Johnny, it was Treowen for Johnny. He measured the depth and extent of self-abnegation demanded of him and did not quail.

David Owen, standing beside his brother's bed, made his vows of knighthood without a backward thought. There are natures, such as these, that can in a single impulse leap to the trumpet-call of self-sacrifice at its highest and hardest. With them it is destined to be no mere passing mood of sentiment, but a devotion enduring and complete.

The old woman looked at her master curiously as by and by she parted from him at the door, holding the candle high, to light him along the dark passage. On his face, marked with lines of gravity, strained with

mental fatigue, there was a new serenity—a serenity both stern and sweet.

The Welsh are a mystic race; old Nanny went back to her watch beside her well-beloved charge, muttering to herself: “Behold an angel of the Lord spake with him. . . .”



Book I

JOHNNY'S BROTHER

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.—
HORACE.

"Why did the lamp go out?"

*"I shaded it with my cloak, to save it from
the wind. . . ."*—RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

Book I

CHAPTER I

The Shepherd and the Hope

THE years that had passed between his father's death and this tenth anniversary of it seemed both long and short to David Owen as he looked back upon them; an endless chain of days filled to the brim with successive toils; the hand to hand fight to wrest from Nature at first a bare living dole, then that slow yet steady increase which was to make his great sacrifice worth the while. Hard-pressed, strenuous, austere, the years had swung by: the old life of pleasure and leisure was but as the memory of a dream. It appeared to him now that he must have always risen in the small hours of the morning in the chilly exquisite spring dawns; in the raw darkneses of winter. Always he had tramped, or ridden, or worked with his own hand among his men the day through; wrangled in the market town; gone staggering across the snow blizzard with the new-born lamb in his arms; sweltered the long hot August noons by the dipping ponds. Always he had come home at night so dog-tired that he was scarce ensconced in his chair by the lone hearth before sleep overpowered him. Every Sunday he had broken the Sabbath rest with the casting of accounts. Had he ever been able to sit down and read for an idle hour? Had there been a time when a walk, much less a journey, could be without a thought of gain or loss; without some purpose of duty

to his life's work? He had bound himself to serve Treowen. And Treowen had been a hard master, had driven him like a slave. The best years of his manhood had come and gone and found him with his eyes still fixed upon his task.

He had not faltered. It had been harder than he had anticipated; harder in every way; and the rewards had been grudging. It had meant a complete abnegation of most of the things that to one of his class make life worth living.

A man may determine and carry through some single act of heroism easily enough; it is another thing to carry it through inch by inch, as it were, through the stretching years. But David, though his heart had failed him more than once, had held on. He had unflinchingly adhered to his initial resolves. He had from the first cut himself adrift from all the amenities of gentility. Social life had become non-existent to him; the company of his peers a forgotten taste. He had "dropped the gentleman" as he had sworn to do and become the farmer: since no gentleman was ever known to farm and profit. But though the renunciation had been prompt, profits had been delayed.

It does not take long for a man to be forgotten once he sets his will that way. Most of the important neighbours of Treowen by this time regarded its master as a being either too eccentric or too obstinately foolish to be worth further cultivation; just a few had kindly feelings toward him. But even these had given up the fruitless effort of endeavouring to draw him once more among them.

Only Lady Celia still frequented Treowen. And David would not have wished relations to lapse between them because she was too valuable a friend for Johnny. It had, indeed, become an established custom for the lad to spend the chief part of his holidays at Penarth.

Treowen, shut up but for two or three living rooms, staffed only by faithful Nanny and a wild servant girl, had become too rough a place in David's eyes for the delicately nurtured, unconsciously fastidious Eton boy. Two or three days' picnicking was very great fun; and both brothers enjoyed it to the utmost—holidays more truly for the elder than for the younger, but David was relentless in his determination to keep Johnny from the ugly side of his own penurious existence. He had said to himself and to the boy that he intended one Owen to remain a gentleman. There was no doubt a far-seeing, protective tenderness in his decision to accept the Morgans' kindly offer; but there was also a secret pride. He could not have borne to see Johnny turn with disgust from a coarse meal, look bored with the perpetual talk of ewes and wethers, of uplands and lowlands; to note a critical glance cast on his own earth-soiled garments, on his toil-marked hands.

For a few days life together went very well; for long weeks the strain would have been an impossible one; above all during those first years of wellnigh superhuman efforts and recurrent disappointments, when to keep going at all, pay his way, and not encroach on the fund laid aside for John's expenses, required a rigidity of retrenchment that amounted to black penury.

Well, that time of trial was long over! The last three years the tide of fortune had begun to roll steadily in favour of Treowen. David, as he had planned, had found himself able to start horse breeding; and the speculation had proved from the first successful.

And on this morning—a day charged with so many painful memories—there had come to him a final triumphant vindication. A seam of anthracite had been located on some outlying portion of the estate. According to the experts' report there was every indication that the find was of the most promising character.

The possessor of Treowen, definitely converted from a hard-working farmer to a prospective millionaire, sat gazing at the letter. He was astonished to find how curiously unelated he felt. He was not even sure as yet that the change would make for his content and peace of mind. He had been proud of his victories over circumstances. At the beginning of the race he had been heavily handicapped. Doggedly he had held on. Those swift runners which so often outpace the struggling man at the start of his career—doubt, despondency, despair—had been left far behind. The obstacles which had reared themselves before him—unforeseen disappointments, unavoidable disasters—he had set his teeth and leaped over. Now that hand over hand, so to speak, he was reaching his goal, he was told that he need strive no more. He could dismount from the steed of courage that had borne him so gallantly and against such odds. He could, if he chose, take his place among the loungers. There was enough for him now, as well as for Johnny!

David roused himself from his abstraction. He had not finished his letter, he read on :

"The Brendrod Dale Company are quite willing to take it up on royalties which it would be folly to refuse. At least, so it seems to me. It is much the simpler plan, as well as less risky, to accept this proposal. It relieves you of all responsibilities and places your future and that of Mr. John upon a most advantageous footing.

"My dear Mr. Owen, I congratulate you indeed. We are now rewarded for what I may, without vanity, style our splendid stand against adversity."

David had smiled as he read. For some years—indeed from the first hour of success—the excellent Trevor Williams had been completely oblivious of the

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part he had played in dissuading, discouraging, prognosticating misfortune to the man who would not listen to advice.

"And it was the good day we agreed to stick to the land, Mr. Owen," was now a phrase often on his lips.

The letter proceeded upon an even more remarkable note of self-congratulation.

"It strikes me now that our old friend, Mr. Powell-Wannemaker, may have had some inkling of the hidden treasure on the estate, when he offered such a remarkable price for it. It was a special providence, whatever, that induced us to refuse that last really fantastic sum. I was tempted—though, Welshman as I am, my heart agreed only too ardently for a man of business, in your feeling that no purse was deep enough to buy Treowen from an Owen.

"The fellow, by the way, never indulged his fancy for Welsh castles, after all, in spite of his talk about St. Colum's. But it may be worth mentioning that he is director in the White Rose collieries, near Cardiff (Grummell & Fischers, as you may know). I doubt indeed it was not the Powell blood, if ever he had any in his veins, that stirred him in our direction."

The lord of Treowen folded this letter slowly; inserted it in the long blue envelope containing the report, and placed it in the breast pocket of his worn corduroy jacket. Then he got up, crossed the floor, mounted the steps of the window dais, and stood looking back into the room.

The oak parlour, his father's study of yore, was his living room. Economy reigned at Treowen, in spite of increasing prosperity; until the last mortgage was paid off David had not intended to relax, for even then there was the future, Johnny's future, to be built up. Here he had sat, just ten years ago, and heard the doom

of his family pronounced. And here, a little later, in the sunset, he had fought against the sentence; had refused submission.

The gate-legged table near the hearth bore the remnants of just such a rough substantial meal as the farmer who has been on his rounds since dawn expects to find ready for his return. At the Jacobean writing-bureau against the wall how many dismal nights he had toiled wrestling with figures and facts which might well have broken down a cleverer man—agonised almost at times, yet still holding on!

But there, too, he had known many a good experience; from that triumphant moment when the long array of figures totalled at last a balance on the right side, to that bland hour only last week, when he had sent the cheque that finally cleared the mortgage on Pentgellard lands. The stud-farm had more than fulfilled his expectations; and the recent purchases of the two friendly young German officers who had been hunting all the winter in Gwentshire had practically cleared him of his best nags while so satisfactorily restoring his credit.

He sank down on the deep window-seat; mechanically drew his pipe and turned his eyes and thoughts upon the outer world. He loved to smoke that morning pipe and take his brief rest, and pause for thought in this spot before tackling the day's work again. Standing so high, Treowen dominated from the angle of this window an immense stretch of champaign. During those first years, it was here he had planned, staring out upon the wide panorama, many advantageous dispositions of the land. Here he had made up his mind to cut down the whole of the lower oak woods—a sacrifice which had added no despicable sum to his small initial capital. It was here he had decided upon the draining of the marshes by the river, now his best pastures. It

was here, too, that, spring after spring, he had seen his flocks increase; watched without compunction the gradual encroachment of hay and turnip and potato field on the great park land, the whilom pride of Treowen and pleasure of his ancestors.

He had taken no shame to have haycocks beneath his very windows; nor to see the first great black furrow run across the green glade. Indeed he had marked with a farmer's eye the straightness of the line.

Now, as he sat and puffed at his briar, there came to him a sudden picture of Treowen before the change. The ten years which had, a little while ago, seemed to spread to such endless length between him and that day of death, shrank to nothing. It appeared but an hour ago that he had stood blankly staring forth upon this fair scene. The echo of Mr. Williams' pronouncement was ringing in his ears: "There is nothing for it, you must sell Treowen."

His fixed gaze no more beheld the spring grass growing high and lush; the wild tangles of neglected shrubberies against the terrace wall; the dark red glistening field, just below the steps where three or four men were busy setting potatoes. Nor beyond again, the long patch of disfigured, dark and mutilated woodland. He saw instead the emerald green turf, spreading with the sheen of velvet in the sunshine up to the borders of jonquil and early tulip. The almond blossom was tall and rosy at the back of the azalea beds, where each neat bush was bursting in the spring green. A small company of deer passed from one golden oak wood to the other, a flight of shadow creatures.

There was great beauty in the vision which memory evoked with such unexpected vividness before him—great art also. In the foreground bands of colour in ordered masses and exquisite gradation—the old-world dignity of clipped hedges, of flagged paths, of stone

vases brimming with flowers. Farther away a wildness no less disciplined and opulent; those miles of park land deer-haunted; cunningly grouped plantation. The picture in fine of a great estate administered by a man of keen artistic taste, and what so often goes with it, unbridled extravagance.

David remembered how he had flung himself out of the house and hung upon the fence, battling against the doom that had been laid upon him; and how he had come to his decision without any reason, at a mere cry of the heart; how he had known himself too intimately rooted in the soil of Treowen to survive a parting; and how, strong in his new purpose, he had turned homewards and met little Johnny running toward him, the sunshine on his fair head.

Once again he seemed to feel the touch of the small cold fingers in his—Johnny! He had kept his word there, too.

David came back to the present with a start.

A shadow had fallen between him and the light without. Here was Johnny himself, coming across the young meadow grass where had once been the close-shorn bowling green. The past merged into the present as with a click of machinery. The little boy, with the clinging hands, and the tossed curly head was no more. Here was Johnny, tall and blond and nineteen, the most exquisitely turned-out undergraduate that ever issued from the threshold of Christchurch.

Johnny had remained fair, as in his childhood, and had kept much of his childish delicacy of feature. But the seriousness and reserve of his early days had given place to a bubbling effervescence of healthful spirits. Perhaps both attitudes served the same purpose, that of sedulously concealing anything in the way of emotion. There seemed to be nothing in life as it presented itself to him that did not afford matter for a joke. He now

hailed his brother with a shout in the absurd idiom he deemed appropriate to the Welshman.

"Hallo, Mr. Owen, whatever! And how's sheep this morning? There's nice it is for lamb, indeed!"

"Johnny, is it possible?" exclaimed the elder. He stood looking down through the window, his face beaming. Here was the dearest being on earth to him! "I'd no idea you were coming."

The undergraduate shifted the soft hat to the back of his head. A rim of clipped silver-fair curls shone above his white forehead. It was one of Johnny's trials that his pale opaque skin refused to sunburn. He stood with legs apart and proceeded to light a cigarette, looking up the while with a kind of affectionate impudence at the broad figure that leaned out of the open casement.

"I didn't know I was coming myself, Davy *bach*; meant to be glued to the books and my old coach—Lord, that is a slow coach—regular hearse whatever! Couldn't stick it out! Easter time of joy—isn't that Scriptural and proper? Sudden thought came to me last night. Why be unscriptural? So I took train and rolled down. I'm at Lady Celia's. And, by the way, Peggy has ridden over with me."

David knew that he ought to have been shocked and grieved if not irate at this open disregard of engagements solemnly entered into. It had been Johnny's own suggestion that he should spend the Easter vacation reading up for his next examination! It showed a lamentable want of stability that he should thus cast away his good resolutions; but David could not find anything in his heart but gladness and sympathy. The gladness was for himself and the sympathy for Johnny. So he merely smiled down at the goodly youth in the spring sunshine and asked:

"What have you done with Peggy, then?"

"She's in the stables. No," he glanced over his

shoulder, "here she comes! There's bold that girl is, Davy! She won't let me out of her sight."

He flung the words loudly over his shoulder in the direction of Miss Morgan, who, a quaintly attractive figure, in the long tunic coat and breeches affected by the latter-day Amazon, came striding, high-booted, into view. She made a leap at the young man and aimed a box at his ear which he deftly eluded. He started running, in mock alarm. She darted after him in hot pursuit but, hampered by her riding boots, had little chance of catching him. Mocking he kept just out of reach. At last he let himself be seized and pommelled; little gloved fists hammering with right goodwill. Her hat had fallen off; her hair had become loosened from the plait and hung dishevelled about her. Glorious dark hair it was—with copper lights in its curls. She was small and slenderly built, with little of her mother's dominating beauty, but a delicate prettiness all her own. To David she seemed a mere child. Johnny took his belabouring philosophically; and at the conclusion, caught the little flushed face between his hands and kissed it deliberately on either cheek. Then he looked up at David and laughed:

"Don't be shocked; Peggy and I are engaged—at least, we are going to be. Peggy likes it, and so do I. Bless him, Peg, he's blushing! Don't blush for us, David *bach*. We should never dream of doing it for ourselves, should we, Peggy?"

David was a simple man and he had old-fashioned ideas. It was true that he had coloured. His brother's free and easy caress offended a certain inner dignity; and if he had found words in his embarrassment, they would have been rebuking. Yet the smile remained on his lips. They were so handsome, the pair of them, and so young!

"We're coming up," said Johnny, "and we're dread-

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fully hungry, aren't we, Peg? Nanny must rummage out something for us, and then I'm going to show Peg the house. She's never been right through it—have you, Peg?—not since she was a kid, anyhow. Here's your hat, child; come along."

They set off running together; his arm round her shoulders. David heard their laughter and merry voices float away to ring out again within the house. It was like an April gust rushing in from the fields. Their flying feet and their happy laughter echoed through the vaulted hall. He came down from the window recess. The look of doubt had left his eyes, and the smile his lips. A tenderness, too deep to be anything but grave, filled his heart.

Life and love, the future of the old house, all he had toiled for! He forgot the message of wealth in his breast pocket. It seemed to him that in a little while he would have nothing left to desire.

CHAPTER II

Youth and the Ancient House

"PEGGY, my dear," said John Owen, "you must allow me—I must beg of you to tie up your hair before old Nanny comes in. I do not wish that ancient and revered dame to think her nursling is going to espouse a wild Injun nor yet a lunatic escaped from the padded room."

The girl tossed off her soft hat and began to push back the thick tresses, with a grimace at her young lover to remove any possible impression of submissiveness. Johnny surveyed her judiciously.

"Plait it tight, Peggy. You've got a wisp over your left ear. Tut-tut! Allow me, my dear. Where's your ribbon? Out on the grass? Tut, there's wild for you! Never mind, here's a nice bit of red tape from brother David's writing-table. And if you wouldn't mind, my love, taking a seat at the breakfast-table there, old Nanny (whom I hear coming along) will escape the shock of your legs. I'd like to break her gradually to Nanny," he added gravely, turning to David. "Too late!" He flung up his hands with a dramatic gesture. "For God's sake, Peggy, at least sit down!"

The door opened, and the old woman entered, scolding as she came.

"And indeed, Master David, I'd not forgotten the breakfast things whatever. There's twice it is the bell's gone." She paused, stared, and clapped her hands together; wet hands, fresh from the washtub, that she

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had been wiping angrily in a corner of her apron. "And is it thee, Master Johnny, my dear, dear boy! There's glad I am!"

"And there's glad I am, Nanny *bach*. Indeed, whatever, look you!"

Johnny hugged his old nurse with right goodwill.

Nanny clutched the youth tremulously.

"*Mawredd awwl!* and to think, when Bessie ran in with her story of the two young gentlemen that were riding up, never did I have a thought whatever——"

Johnny interrupted with a shout:

"Two young gentlemen! You remind me of my manners. Pray allow me to introduce Mr. Pegtop Morgan——"

"Oh, nonsense, Johnny. I'm Peggy, Mrs. Price. Don't you remember me?"

"*Mawredd awwl!*" cried Mrs. Price in another tone.

"Don't look at her boots, Nanny. Look at her head, and then you won't feel so bad. The face is the face of Jacob, if the feet are the feet of Esau. Can't you think of something out of the Bible, Peggy? Nanny won't think you so altogether lost if——"

"Johnny!" said David rebukingly.

"Young master," interpolated Nanny, "he that makes a mock of the Word——"

Johnny looked from one to the other of the shocked faces.

"Aren't they dears? Peggy, isn't it refreshing? I say, Nanny, give Peg a kiss. Good old girl! She's going to marry me. And, oh, I say, we are hungry. No, I won't eat at David's horrid breakfast-table. You might give him a clean cloth, though he is an 'orny-'anded son of toil."

"Saturday, Master Johnny."

The undergraduate whooped.

"Saturday! Oh, Peggy, isn't it delicious? Do you have a bath o' Saturday nights, Davy? Perhaps, indeed. A good day, look you, whatever. I say, let us get back to our muttons. I'm hungry—wolfish, in fact. Let's go down to the dairy, Peg, and drink all Nanny's cream from the skimmer. Saturday! You've got a hot loaf in the oven. Ah, see what a farmer's boy I am. I know all about things. I want to show Peg the house, too, so we'll be a bit of a while. Come, Peg. Excellent wretch, perdition take my soul, but I do love thee. Come, Peg, she's seen your legs; you needn't be afraid to use them."

The girl flung a look of pretty defiance at David as she let herself be hustled out of the room by her mercurial young lover. Her small, vividly coloured face reminded David, who was inarticulately poetic, of some open-air flower—field poppy or mountain anemone—at once delicate yet hardy. She had a wild, impertinent grace. Her outlook was straight and bold, her every movement alert. If it had not been for that sunny plait of hair she might very well have passed for a handsome boy.

David made a step forward to accompany them; but the great door was dashed back almost in his face, and he stood still. This gay youth had no desire for his company. Indeed, the elder brother felt singularly solitary. Here were two bewildering, strange creatures out of a new world, with which he had nothing in common, which, in truth, puzzled, almost abashed him. And yet the room seemed suddenly to have grown dark and cold about him, as if the sunshine had gone out of it with the laughing, audacious pair. He looked at Nanny. She was clasping her hands.

"Master David, 'tis queer manners, whatever."

"Children, Nanny," said David. Then some tension within him gave way. "God bless them!" he said.

The young voices and laughter echoed again through the ancient silences of Treowen. "Ah, doesn't it do your heart good?" he cried involuntarily. "We've been wanting this."

Her eye was already on the door, yearning to be in pursuit of the Benjamin.

"I'd best be seeing what mischief they're after. There's no harm in my lad—a fine young gentleman he's grown, indeed. But the young lady . . . *Achy fil!*"

Left alone, David returned to the window, sat down on the sill, and musingly began once more to fill his neglected pipe. He was still conscious of a sense of forlornness; yet, being a sweet-tempered man, naturally devoid of egotism, he had no movement of self-pity; but he examined the situation without self-deception. He accepted the fact that his company was undesirable. It was quite natural, he thought, that Johnny should find him dull, ponderous, almost a being of another class. He acknowledged himself as something quite apart from this brilliant youthful assurance. Its modernity troubled and baffled him. All of a sudden he realised that his own youth was gone. It had been given in labour, plodding, in determined toil—for Johnny. That was part of the sacrifice—the sacrifice for which he had no regret. From one day to another he had ceased to be young, young in the spirit. For a flash, as he looked back, it seemed to him that his work had been soul-destroying, brutalising. He had become a clumsy, hard-muscled, close-calculating, coarse farmer. Had he ever been a gay, delicate-handed young creature like Johnny, with the last social slang on his lips, the last thing in ties round his neck, a spray from the fountains of the classics sparkling upon the pleasant uncultivation of his mind? Had he ever looked upon the world with

that conquering eye, trod the earth as if it all belonged to him by right? Had he ever been the serene, unconscious patrician before whom crowds must willingly give way?

The sun lay warm on his back. He puffed the strong tobacco, while his shifting glance fell on the gold-tipped cigarette of which Johnny had taken three whiffs and tossed away short of the big hearth. He liked this high-flavoured old pipe; that absurd weed would have no zest for him now. It seemed to him symbolic. "No gentleman ever made farming pay," had said the pessimist Williams. And he had sworn, in answer, to sink the gentleman and be the farmer. No doubt he had succeeded in his programme. He looked down at his hand. It was tanned almost to coffee colour, hardened. "The 'orny 'anded," Johnny had mocked. Johnny, with his slender, long white fingers, beautiful and useless-looking, like those of the Lely boy-ancestor that hung in the hall. Well, the hand that held the plough and wielded the spade, and clipped the sheep and lunged in the wild yearlings, and counted the coin, that was the hand that had saved Treowen and kept the old pictures in their places—for Johnny!

Johnny and that little girl he had so oddly chosen for himself from his very childhood, were even now innocently taking stock of their future possessions. In another nature these thoughts might well have led to bitterness, but David's heart only swelled with a great thankfulness. It is given to few to accomplish so fully what they have dreamed.

The tide of his musings began to turn again to the future. John would marry early; there was every indication of it. A year or so in the Guards—to continue the family tradition—then the young pair might come to Treowen, a Treowen fully restored to its ancient

dignity, live here for the greater part of the year. There would be a patter of little feet about the stairs and younger voices still.

No one would have guessed, to see that square-shouldered, almost hard-featured man, rough clad, puffing at his old pipe, that he was building scenes of such tender romance in his mind, that his soul was moved within him almost to tears.

"They won't mind the old brother hanging about the place," he was thinking. "I believe I should be quick to feel whenever I was in the way. Treowen is big enough, anyhow. And Johnny'll want me to keep things going outside."

There was a clatter of flying feet down the great, uncarpeted oak stairs, a scuffle and an intermingling of high merry voices. Then Johnny and his unofficial fiancée broke headlong into the room again.

Peggy fell silent as she came in, and flung that glance at once challenging and appealing at the Master of Treowen.

"Here we are," cried Johnny. "We've got a great deal to say to you, David. Don't get up, Davy dear; Peggy's not a lady yet. She never will be really. She's only just Peggy. Here, Miss Morgan, I'll drag up a chair for you, and I'll sit beside the gentle shepherd on the window-sill. Faugh! I wish Nanny'd clear off that horrid breakfast! Never mind."

David rose slowly, put down his pipe, and lifted the chair which the boy and girl between them were lugging noisily across the floor up to the window recess. He looked at his brother inquiringly; he was not sure whether Johnny, through his apparent rattle, had not intended a rebuke upon his rusticity; it was true he had not thought to bestir himself for the child Peggy seemed to be.

John returned his brother's gaze blandly. There was

something inscrutable about the boy. David had often wondered what went on really within the depths of the young mind.

"Say 'thank you,' pretty," now ordered the undergraduate, as Peggy flung herself into the chair provided.

"Thank you, Mr. Owen," said the girl demurely.

"Mr. Owen!" cried John. "How pompous! You can't call him Mr. Owen, Peg. Say brother."

"Thank you, Johnny's brother," said she quaintly.

David gave a sudden laugh. It was very well found. "That's just what I am, Peggy." He cast a kindly look at her and then turned to Johnny. "It's all I want to be, my lad."

"Well now, perhaps, indeed," cried that irrepressible individual with cheerful irrelevancy. But he looked down as he spoke, the colour had welled into his face. There fell a pause. David expected, half hoped for a word, a touch of the hand, a glance only. But nothing came. Johnny drew out his case, lit a cigarette with great deliberation, and then, suddenly, broke into voluble speech:

"Self-defence, Davy. Your tobacco is—you won't mind my saying so—rather rather! Have a cig., Peg?" He flung the case across to her. She caught it deftly, and, with her innocent challenging gaze on David, inviting surprise, proceeded to kindle one with practised ease. Meanwhile, the boy went on unchecked. "I said we'd a lot to tell you, didn't I? We have quite made up our minds, Peggy and I, we're going to come here when we are married. I'm going to marry her at twenty-three. Not a day sooner, Peg-top, so you needn't turn up your eyes so despairingly. At twenty-three."

"How do you know you'll get me then? I might choose to marry a duke in my first season."

"Oh, that wouldn't matter." He waived her objec-

tion aside. "I'd bear up. I'd just sit in your pocket till your duke died. 'The Duchess of Kidderminster and Mr. Owen,' that would be quite chic, extremely fashionable. I think I'd rather like it, do you know. Of course, if she did marry her duke, Davy, I couldn't come and live here till she'd put him in his little box. I couldn't live far away from Peg. We'd still be all in all to each other. But never fear. No duke would want her. There isn't enough of her. She wouldn't show off the family fenders."

"Family what?"

"Dear brother, you are so woolly and innocent. The tiaras. By the way, haven't we some too? Diamonds at the bank, you know. Oh, never mind. Don't be conscientious. I don't want the inventory now, time enough when the day is fixed. When I am twenty-three, Peg. Well, as I was saying—I wish you wouldn't both interrupt so, I can't get a word in edgewise—when Peg and I are married, we'll come and live here, because we've decided we like the simple life. We'll say farewell to tango, night clubs, post-impressionist garments, auction bridge and Russian dancers, and all the rest of it. And Peg will wear a print frock and look after the dairy. And I'll be a gentleman farmer—what's that you say?"

"I said," good-humouredly David raised his voice, "not like me."

Johnny, his mouth a little open, stared; once more the colour mounted in the fair pallor of his face. David turned to Peggy:

"If you want to make farming pay, you can't be a gentleman. That was made clear to me when I started. I was resolved to make it pay."

"Oh, I see," said Peggy, who was staring too.

"You don't see anything of the kind," cried Johnny angrily. "There is nothing to see; you can't see a thing

that's not there—unless you've got d.t. Oh, I wish you would not all interrupt. Where was I? I'll drive Peg's butter to market. We'll keep two or three nice little carts for market, with jolly strong cobs to drive them, and shining brass harness, and——”

“I'm always forgetting,” said the elder. He drew a long blue envelope out of his pocket. “When you come and live here, Johnny and Peggy, you'll have more money than you'll know what to do with. We've found coal on the property.”

The two young things shot almost frightened glances at each other, and then both pairs of shining eyes turned to David :

“I say, are you pulling our legs? That's what comes of wearing top-boots, Peggy !”

“See for yourself,” said David, and handed the letters to his brother.

Johnny, arching his eyebrows, pursing his mouth, glanced at the sheets one after the other, then passed them, with an elaborate bow, to Peggy :

“It seems a true bill,” he remarked casually. “Read about your future affluence, my love. I say, you know, it only means two motor-cars, instead of brass-mounted milk carts.”

Miss Morgan had turned white under her healthy sun-flecked tan. She folded the letters and put them back in the envelope ; then, getting up from her chair, laid it between the brothers on the window-seat. Then, with a suddenness, which took David completely by surprise, she wheeled upon her lover and broke out in a fury :

“I don't want it, I don't want the horrid money. I don't want you rich. I wanted to marry you poor, and come and lead the simple life. I hate a lot of money and fashion and fuss ! You might as well be Ap Rhys Jones or Gwynmawr Richards or any of the other horrid

creatures that mother's always asking to the place. I wanted to defy mother and marry you poor, and live at Treowen, and have it shabby and old and lovely. And I like it as it is with all the bare black boards. And I don't even mind the apples in the state rooms about which you made such a fuss just now. Nanny would have taught me to make the butter. Oh, now it's all spoilt and made horrid. You'll be horrid. You'll be worse about your ties and socks than ever. I'd have loved you in thick boots and stockings, and with great brown hands, like a man, like—like you, Johnny's brother! It's all spoilt. I wish I was dead!"

She burst into passionate sobs. Johnny got up. He seemed quite unperturbed to David's thinking. He took the quaint Amazon figure bodily into his arms with the words:

"Peggy, you're more precious than frankincense!"

David looked on the strange little scene. More and more, these two seemed outside his simple comprehension. The girl's passionate display of feeling touched him by its childish disinterestedness, but he could not understand it from Lady Celia's daughter—Lady Celia, whom he knew as a woman of profound worldliness, in spite of capricious impulses of generosity and even altruism! Johnny's coolness was altogether mystifying to him. Was everything a kind of play to the boy—milk carts or motor-cars—did he see nothing higher, or deeper, in the future? "You're more precious than frankincense!" The words knocked at David's heart, echoing beauty and passion: why had Johnny spoken in that light tone? Was it deliberately to rob them of any value?

There is nothing more contagious than emotion. The sight of Peggy, sobbing against his brother's breast, stirred David. Catching Johnny's smile above her bright head he cried with anger:

"Good God, lad, is nothing sacred to you?"

"Sacred?" exclaimed the other. "Peggy, stop crying! Isn't he a darling? Oh, Peggy dear, that we should live to be addressed in this middle-Victorian tone! Sacred, Davy dear? Nothing is sacred, nowadays, thanks be! We are children of Nature. No one will enjoy the motor-cars more than Peggy. She's just disappointed, she's been counting so much on the score off my godmother. Lady Celia is awfully kind and she likes having me about, because of my good looks, but she never meant me to marry Peggy. She never would have let you have me—with the milk carts, Peggy. Cheer up! With the gold mines—did you say gold mines, David?—and two motor-cars, at least, that'll be different! And if you'd had to marry Caradoc Jones, what's his name, the flannel prince, I really couldn't have sat in your pocket and waited! And, you know, your mother has a thumb, Peggy dear! It would have scrunched our little hopes all to nothing in the end. Kiss me, Peggy." He fell into laughter. "There's David looking out of the window. Now, Davy, why? Certainly, middle-Victorian minds have a lack of sweet simplicity. Why should you turn away when I kiss Peggy? You're not shocked at your lambs gambolling about together. Why should you be shocked at our gambolling together? Isn't all Nature natural and delightful? And what is more natural than to kiss Peggy? You ask if nothing is sacred to me. I don't know what you mean by such a question. Must I go into a corner where nobody's looking when I want to kiss her? If that is sacred, I call it being——"

"I can't argue," interrupted David, gruffly. "I—you're beyond me. Both of you!"

"And, oh, Davy dear, you are such miles behind! Way back, as the Americans say, lost in the mists of the nineteenth century. Don't you see that Peg and I

have come out into the light? We haven't time to-day, or we'd dance the tango for you—just to show you exactly that this is the twentieth. There are, Davy dear, ninety-six different steps in the tango, twenty-three of which are quite, quite proper. We should begin with the twenty-three, to educate you gradually. How many steps have you learned, Peggy?"

"I know seventy," cried the girl. "And they're all proper, you idiot!"

"Bless you, darling! She does not know what improper means. Neither do I, really. We haven't time to stop and be taught to-day by you, Davy. I say, Peg, your mother will have a fit. It's nearly twelve o'clock. There's nice for you," he added, relapsing into his mock Welsh; "there will be a row, perhaps, indeed, yes, yes, whatever! Good-bye, Davy *i fach!* Let us hug old Nanny and be gone! Peg would kiss you too, only you're so particular."

"I don't mind," said the girl. "He is nice."

She advanced, clattering across the polished dais with her high riding boots. David sat crimsoning. A great, stupid oaf, he thought himself. She bent the vivid wild-flower face and the fresh lips kissed him on both cheeks.

"Isn't she precious!" said Johnny, took her hand and ran with her out of the room.

David was once more alone. He sat on. The girl's kisses, her innocent boldness had started a turmoil within him. All at once, for the first time in the whole of his austere and vigorous young manhood, the cost of his sacrifice rose up and threatened to overwhelm him. He had a singular purity of mind, as much from natural inclination as from his self-chosen apartness, his life of toil and denial; and there was nothing gross, nothing personal in the emotion evoked by Peggy's caress. What came upon him was a sense of lost paternity. It

might have been his to catch some slender girl-child to his heart and know it his own flesh and blood. No child of his own would kiss him ever and coax him and call him "Daddy." He would be Johnny's brother—nothing nearer, nothing closer to any human being. As yet, in his great heart, the natural feeling of man for woman had been stifled and crushed by the burden of toil; but the fatherly instinct had been acutely alive from the first moment that he had seen Johnny's baby head in its cradle.

There was all at once a great aching void in his soul. It was not that he wanted thanks, God knew. Johnny took everything for granted, and David asked for nothing else; nothing would have been more abhorrent to him than that his brother should think gratitude, acknowledgment, necessary—even desirable—between them. But did Johnny as much as give him love?

The door opened again and Johnny's crisp, corn-fair head was thrust in.

"One word, Davy dear. If you don't mind, I'd like to come and stay to-morrow. I've told Peggy, now I'm a millionaire, it won't do to make myself cheap—what? It'll have an excellent effect on Lady Celia!"

The boy paused. David's face, that had lit up, fell back into gloom. Johnny played with the lock of the door a moment or two.

"I'd really like to come, Davy. I feel like Peggy—though I won't tell her so. This is a lovely shabby old place, and it's much nicer than anywhere else in the world—with just you, Davy."

He clapped the door quickly upon himself and then opened it again, characteristically anxious to remove an impression of emotion.

"I've asked Nanny to take the apples out of the Queen's room. You can smell them all down the passage. I've a fancy for the green tapestry room, if you

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don't happen to want to keep, what d'you call-ums—mangel-wurzels—in it.”

Again the door closed, again it was opened.

“I say, Mr. Owen *bach*, you'd better come down and stand behind Nanny. She'll probably swoon away when she sees Peg get on her horse.”

CHAPTER III

The Cloud of War

DAVID came in tired. He had been out from early dawn. To abandon the active work which was beginning to repay him so well just because in another year or so he might be counted among the rich men of Wales was the last of his intentions. It was not so much that he liked the life, as that it had laid hold of him. He was drawn to his flocks, to his herds, to his mares and foals—he would have felt as one abandoning duty, nay, even as one false to the call of Nature, had he handed over the charge of all those living things to the hireling. The spirit of the shepherd had entered into him: the good shepherd who giveth his life for his flock! Of David, indeed, it might rather be said that he gave his life *to* his flock.

There was besides nothing else that he could do with any zest. He had bent all his energies in one direction; he could not now turn them elsewhere.

So he had tramped the long day through, over hill and dale. It was a busy time in the pasture and sheepfold, for he was both selling and purchasing stock.

He had been angry, for he had found carelessness. And he had been sad, for a rogue dog had got into a certain field and harried a choice set of lambs. With stiff legs pathetically outstretched they had lain, a row of them: like toys overturned, one would have said, only for the sinister stains dappling the white fleeces.

He had himself picked one out of a ditch where it had fallen in its flight and got entangled in the mud and thorns; and had carried it to the sheep-fold in his arms.

By July the spring lambs are well grown creatures; and the water in the fleece increased the weight. It was a hot, sultry day, and the effort had tested even his hardened strength. He was breathless and drenched when he reached the hut. And, in the end, the creature was found to be dead in his arms. Some inward strain, the old head shepherd opined.

Weariness was upon David, therefore, as he came home in the beautiful empurpled twilight of the full summer evening. Weariness, not only of the body, but of the spirit. He sat heavily to his supper. As usual, the London paper which the post brought in the afternoon lay beside his plate. He had not seen the local news-sheet, having started out with the dawn.

Almost mechanically he spread out *The Times* and glanced at the middle sheet.

"GRAVE OUTLOOK. AUSTRIA DECLARES WAR ON SERBIA.
UNIVERSAL EUROPEAN CONFLAGRATION IMMINENT"

He threw the sheet impatiently on the floor. "Those newspaper fellows, they must always have a scream of some kind," he supposed. As if it mattered to England what a couple of foreign countries did to each other. Had they not been at each other's throats a year or more? He reached for the *Gwent and County Monitor*, which lay on the writing table just at his back. He must see what prices ruled at Gwent-Town market yesterday. So the matter passed from his mind.

But next day the papers were still screaming; and the day after too. He glanced incredulously at the ominous headlines and avoided reading the alarmist

commentaries and leading articles. It was only on the Saturday, that first golden day of a golden August, that he at last saw and understood.

The storm threat had been to his thinking merely on other horizons. Now, in the pure serenity of the warm skies that overarched his own peaceful land, he could no longer refuse to behold it: the War Cloud, it was there! A cloud, no bigger than a man's hand it was true; but the shadow of the mailed fist and a menace to all the world.

David rode to Gwent for news at the club. With horrible rapidity the cloud had spread; the whole land, even to this distant placid corner, was already stirring under its black portent. It was a curious stirring, a great, stern, almost silent, upheaval; a sullen fire, running low and red, escaping only here and there into flame. Had he, who had flung the brand, been there to see, he might well have repented the rashness of the deed. For when a nation turns to war, as England did that day, with a deadly quiet, without shout or threat, without song or acclamation, it means that she is possessed of the determination that ultimately leads to victory.

Now, the Welsh are an excitable people, and will raise a mighty clamour and outcry upon a small matter. But to-day, as he rode through the streets of the beautiful old town, David passed groups of grave-faced men who spoke few words to each other, and those in low, contained tones; whose eyes were fixed as upon a distant and terrible purpose; whose hands hung motionless but clenched by their sides.

The club-room was thronged but still silent. Members greeted each other with a nod or jerk of the eyebrows and unrelaxed faces; passed the paper to each other without comment. Sir Gwydyr Morgan stood on the hearthrug with another county magnate, and they

were conversing under their voices. All at once David saw Sir Gwydyr lift his clenched fist and strike the mantelpiece.

"By the Lord!"—the good-humoured, high-coloured face was convulsed so as to be hardly recognisable—"if that's the way of it, I'll—I'll emigrate; I'll never lift my head in England again!"

The other men in the room just raised their eyes, and on every countenance there was the dumb response to that outcry. David advanced and looked over the shoulder of young Idris Jones, Peggy's flannel prince, who was rather characteristically in possession of the latest evening paper.

**"SINISTER REPORT. NO INTERVENTION. ENGLAND'S
SHAME."**

So ran the black headlines.

Something turned in David's soul. It was as if unsuspected a wild beast had slumbered there all his life and had now awakened and sprung. A wave of black rage swept over him. His mouth was suddenly parched. He fell into a chair blindly, buried his head in his hands; no one noticed him.

England's shame. It was not possible!

"They can't do it," said Lord Penpergan to Sir Gwydyr; "but anyhow, if they do, it's only the matter of a couple of days. The people won't stand it. They'll be torn in pieces. And serve them jolly well right."

David's hands were clenched in his thick, close-cropped hair.

To tear them in pieces! Yes, that was what he wanted to do to the cowards who would blight England's fair name for ever.

"I pin my faith in Sir Edward Grey," said a voice

from the other end of the room. "He is a gentleman." There was a quick turning of grateful glances in the direction of the speaker. But another voice put in quickly :

"I have it on the best authority that he is resigning," and fierce gloom settled again upon them all.

David rode home through a wonderful sunset glow. A high gusty wind was blowing, and the clouds about the sky caught fires of rose and scarlet and orange from the heart of the west. It was a sky that seemed full of omen. David, unconsciously as superstitious as all his race, read in it signs of the downfall of England's greatness, a funeral pyre of all her glories. He remembered how Sir Gwydyr had struck the marble mantelshelf of the club and cried out that he must emigrate.

And when at the bend of the road before crossing the river he saw the high gables of Treowen cut the flaming sky in front of him, he told himself bitterly that his life's work had been in vain if all were only to this end; that he had done better to take his ease and let Treowen go, since the earth that bore it was going to be dishonoured.

That Sunday and Monday were the blackest days he had ever known, not excepting the day of his father's funeral. There was no possibility of obtaining news in his quiet valley, and a kind of dread came upon him of riding forth to meet tidings of calamity. The whole atmosphere seemed to be charged with doom. He could find no comfort in the thought that the people must end in enforcing their will upon their Government. It might be possible, nay, probable, inevitable; but the stain would remain: England would have refused herself to the call of honour and duty! Restlessly he went in and out of the house.

If anyone had told him that the sky had been blue

those days, that the sun had shone brilliantly, he would have called him mad. To him the world was dark, the air was thick, stagnant, befogged.

He went down through the oak wood and leaned upon the fence, gazing out upon the fields, where once had been beautiful woodland; and over the placid meadows to where the river leaped and creamed; across fold upon fold of rising hill, amethystine, plum colour and steel blue, to the cone of Pen-y-fal cut out against the sky. And there was no beauty anywhere to his eye. Where he had laid waste the golden oak groves, it was hideous. But no less hideous, he thought, was the fall of the rich valley, the exotic peak upon the horizon. To a sick man the most exquisite fare is poison, so his tormented soul revolted from the fair scenes that he loved so passionately, that he had clung to at such cost.

The hours dropped into each other, slowly, sullenly. The Bank Holiday ran its weary length, and apathy succeeded the first acuteness of his lonely anxiety. It was no longer a hot, angry fire that burned within him: a cold, sickening conviction had settled down upon his heart.

He shut himself in the study; sat brooding, staring into a blank future. How would he now shape things for himself and Johnny? Would it not be best for them to sell Treowen and all its new-found riches and start life afresh in clean, uncontaminated airs? He could not bear that Johnny in his fresh youth should remain in the shadow of a contemptible country. His thoughts turned to Canada, New Zealand; towards some young land, not alien, with her history still to make, where vigour and energy and wholesome pride might still find expansion now that the mother of them all had been betrayed in her old age.

Bank Holiday night the restlessness came upon him

again. Much to Nanny's scandal, he rose from an untouched supper table and declared that he would ride into Gwent for the news; that he might be very late home and would let himself in. Nanny could not understand the situation at all. Quiet, sensible, Christian folk should shrink from war as from sin; that was her point of view; and that it should be her own steady master who was so fevered to break the peace that he could scarce keep still, and had not, to her knowledge, eaten or drunk enough to keep a babe alive these two days, was sheer bedevilment. Nothing short of demoniac possession could explain it.

Mr. Owen of Treowen was a rare visitor at the County Club, so rare that many of the members scarce knew him by sight. But his appearance that night, about eleven o'clock, evoked no surprise among the half-dozen gentlemen lingering vaguely in the smoking-room. Old Lord Penpergan was pishing and pshawing behind the latest newspaper. His car, with four or five others, was waiting reproachfully in the street, and he knew that Lady Penpergan, who disliked irregularity even of the most justifiable description, would receive him with extreme ill-grace when he returned in the small hours; but his eldest son had promised to ring him up from Westminster when the fateful decision had been reached, and he was determined to wait for the message. Modern facilities had not yet penetrated to Penpergan Vale.

When at last the porter came with the summons that his lordship was wanted at the telephone, more than one of the anxious loungers made a movement as if to accompany him out of the room, but, with characteristic British reserve, thought better of it and merely crossed the other leg.

David sat staring unseeingly at the news page. The instants ticked by on the clock. Sir Gwydyr growled

sotto voce to his neighbour that Penpergan was such a fellow for talk. The other shook his head. If it had been good news, he opined, he would have been back to tell them.

"News?" echoed the colonel; "what news do you expect? Lot of shilly-shally beggars. Don't know their own minds. Never can pin a Liberal down to anything definite, sir. Can't give a straight answer to a straight question."

"Sir Edward Grey——" began the gentleman who had already proclaimed his confidence in that statesman.

At this moment the door opened. Lord Penpergan entered and closed it quietly behind him. He had a thin, hatchety face, with grey whiskers of old-fashioned cut, and those prominent eyes which seem always to have a startled expression. Sir Gwydyr glanced at him and gave a harsh laugh.

"I never expected anything else," he said, and rose.

"Anything what?" asked Lord Penpergan in a measured voice.

"The worst," grunted the magnate.

"Pshaw! I never had any doubt myself. Mobilisation orders gone out. Fleet mobilised this afternoon, as a matter of fact."

There was a moment's odd silence. Then Sir Gwydyr said:

"D'you mean it's war?"

"What else? What else did you expect, since they're marching into Belgium. Of course it's war."

"Didn't I say trust Sir Edward Grey?" cried the champion of the Foreign Secretary, on a high note of triumph.

He was the only man to betray emotion. The others looked at him as if in surprise. Sir Gwydyr searched

for his gloves on the table, stretched himself comfortably and walked towards the door.

"Good-night, Penpergan; we'll all be pretty busy now, I expect. Hope they'll give us old boys a chance."

"I hope they'll hang the fellows who hung back in the Cabinet," said his lordship.

His fishlike gaze seemed as fixed and startled as ever; but he gave the chuckle which with him was a sign of the utmost joviality. He was whistling voicelessly as he walked out of the club behind his neighbours.

David sat on a while. The two great men of the county having departed, the tongues of the other members were loosened. The persistent optimist called for a whisky and soda and cigars. He took great credit to himself for having pinned his faith in Sir Edward Grey, and had all the air of having personally assisted in the saving of his country's honour.

A little man with a close grey beard, whom David knew by sight as a doctor from the other side of the valley, remarked with a smile: "I am glad I let my boy go into the Yeomanry. It's a good thing now for everyone to have his place marked out."

The Liberal supporter of the Government interposed loudly that he had one son at Woolwich and the other in the Welsh Fusiliers. But he reckoned, condescendingly, that the Yeomanry would quite likely be called out—for home defence.

As David jogged home he was glad that the sinking moon should still be shining on the sinuosity of the river; the road lay for many miles beside the water, in the deep hollows of the vale, and there was often but a yard or two of grass between the highway and the water's edge.

Had he been of an analytical turn of mind he might

have wondered at the curious fashion in which his countrymen—if what had just happened at the club could be regarded as typical of the feeling of the whole nation—had taken both the tension and the relief of this crisis in their history.

Even here in Wales the emotional Celt had set his teeth in a dark silence under the menace of a disgrace he was determined not to endure; and had received the news of honourable action without any more apparent emotion than that of relaxation from undue alarm. The attitude of the little gathering he had just left had been one of slight shame at having "made a fuss." Of course it was all right. Nobody had ever had any real doubt. And if there had been a base hesitation on the part of one or two representatives in power, it was safe to have been put right with the least possible delay.

"It's all right, it's all right." That was the rhythm which the black horse beat out on the solitary road to David's ears. It was as natural to be once again in this security as it might be to wake from a distorted world of nightmare to rational every-day life; as natural as to breathe the fine free air of the earth after being shut up in a tunnel.

Whatever happens now, he said to himself, it can never be so bad again—whatever happens.

His glances turned, with a deep sense of its beauty, from one side of his dear valley to the other. What a country to fight for—what a country to die for!—this home of the Welshman, within the greater home of the Briton. Then, as one who has sat down and rested and breathed himself after a horrible contest, in which he has been victor, his mind turned to the next point before him: Every man must have his place now.

David had already had vague thoughts of joining

the Yeomanry. It was a patriotic step for which he had never been able to afford the time during his years of struggle. He now decided that he would instantly apply for admission. He did not doubt that Sir Gwydyr would make things easy for him, though he was above the regulation age.

The dawn was already breaking behind the Sugar Loaf peak when he approached the steeps of Treowen Hill. He felt very much at peace with himself and the world; not the less confident and cheerful for the fact, perpetually recurrent at the back of all his new plans—his thoughts for England and guesses at futurity—that Johnny was not booked for Sandhurst till next year, and that the war would be over—certainly the first intensity of it—before the future master of Treowen could receive his commission.

Faint yellow rays were piercing in through the stone mullions as he went slowly across the hall and up the great oak stairs, which were the wonder of Treowen. Familiar objects seen by this early breaking light often assume a fantastic unreality. But no aspect of dawn was strange to David. He had often found a curious strength and balm to the soul in the first hours of his day of toil: their luminosity, their mystery, the sense of virginity and youth renewed which they hold, were lovely to him as a Sacrament.

This morning the message of spirituality came with a force he had never felt before. The soul of the old house, home of his ancestors, seemed to be awakened to greet him. He thought he had never realised before all the beauty of it, the dignity, the deep-reaching serenity, the promise. He had thought, these days, that Treowen was worse than lost to him; now he knew that it was more than ever his, more than ever dear, more than ever the hope of his race.

As he flung himself, half dressed, on his bed to

snatch an hour's sleep before the big bell should ring its summons in the yard, he had a lightness and cheer in his soul he had scarce known since his boyhood—Johnny and the long days to come: this was his last thought as he fell into slumber.

CHAPTER IV

The Spirit of the Land

"WHAT—Johnny's brother, you? Wonders will never cease."

David was walking down the lime avenue that led to Penarth House—the huge Italianate, neo-classic pile built by the successful mine-owner who had been Sir Gwydyr's grandfather. It stood on gently rising ground above the river—one of those stuccoed mansions in which our ancestors began to delight during the last years of George IV.

In spite of a style suggested by another land, they have a distinctively British appearance. The large windows, the high rooms, the spaciousness and airiness appeal to our insular ideals of comfort. Who is not familiar with the pillared porches, the balustraded roofs, the big hall with its Roman statuary; the white marble staircase spreading on either side into huge corridors? It is the kind of house that requires a good deal of money to keep up. The smallest flaw in the stucco outside produces a forlorn air of dilapidation; any shabbiness within tends to dowdiness.

Lady Celia's lament was always that Penarth was "impossible." She filled it with flowers, luxuries and splendours of every kind, yet vowed that she could not prevent it looking like the best class of Early Victorian hotel.

"Oh, dear," she would sigh, looking discontentedly

round the dim panelled room of some neighbour's ancient house—and Wales boasts many antique residences—"how happy you are! You needn't ever worry about painting or re-covering anything. But if I let Penarth get out of hand it's just like a boarding-house at once."

It continued to look very opulent, however, and was rather dazzling to David's eyes. And though, in his simple mind, he felt he ought to admire all he saw extremely, he was glad to be turning his face again towards the familiar severity of his own surroundings.

The drive was bordered by huge lime trees, and the sound of the bees among them, as he passed beneath their shade this hot August day, was loud in the air. It was a great sound, the very voice of summer itself, choiring sunshine and sweetness and the activities of happy life. He liked these manifestations of Nature; he did not make phrases out of them, or pictures to himself, or deduct meanings from them, but they were part of the joy of his existence. He stopped in the shadow of one of the giant trees, gazed up at the matted inner growth of leafage, and inhaled the hot, sweet air—something of the piercing fragrance of the blossom still hung about them; enough to draw the bees in perpetual rapture.

It was here that Peggy hailed him with the name she had created for him:

"You, Johnny's brother, here? Penarth is honoured!"

David lifted his hat; then stood looking at her without finding the appropriate reply. He had been so long out of society that the ordinary give and take of conversation was quite beyond him. Peggy, a train of dogs at her heel, her skirt of remarkable shortness, her sports coat flung open over a white blouse, her dark

head sheltered by a wide-brimmed red linen hat, looked prettier and even more self-assured than when he had last seen her.

"I've been to ask your father to let me join his Yeomanry," said David at last, in a tone which conveyed apology for his appearance.

She jerked her head.

"Lucky for you—lucky to be a man, I mean. I'll walk with you back to the gate, if you don't mind."

She whistled for her dogs shrilly and marched along by his side, her hands in her pockets.

"Mother won't let me do anything, of course. I'm jolly sick of being born a girl, I can tell you."

"Are you?" He was a little startled at the vehemence of her tone, by her gait, the tilt of her hat, her general air of challenging independence. He wondered if she were going to prove unfeminine, a hoyden.

She burst in upon his doubt: "Except for Johnny."

"You mean——?"

"You are rather slow, aren't you? I mean, of course, because I couldn't otherwise marry Johnny. Fancy"—she slipped coolly on to another topic—"there being people, born men, who don't want to go and fight! Our second footman doesn't. Says he might perhaps help carry a wounded man. Kind of reptile, don't you think? To feel he could do just that and not take his share! I do hope father'll send him away. Mother says she's rather glad to be able to keep one coward in livery, because she hates petticoats. D'you think they'll let our Yeomanry go to the front?"

David didn't know.

"Father'll jolly well see they do," opined Peggy. "Will you like it?" she questioned.

"Better than being left behind."

She flung him a wide, angry look at this insufficient answer, but something in the expression of his counten-

ance turned the swift displeasure into a sudden smile of approval.

"When do you join?"

"I don't know yet. I'm over age, you see. But your father has promised to see the application approved."

"Father must." Peggy was quite decided about that too. Again she whistled to her dogs—a heterogeneous pack they were: a Dachshund, a white Highlander, a golden collie and a Pekinese.

"Are they all yours?" asked David, smiling in his turn.

She nodded. They were valuable animals. The only daughter of this rich house, she was evidently the most petted, indulged creature possible. From the soles of those little Russia leather shoes to the crown of that tilted hat, it was obvious that even her country garb in its simplicity spelt the last note of fashion. David gazed at her as she walked beside him, clear-eyed, self-assertive, defying Fate, and thought to himself that she had probably never known a desire unfulfilled, much less a want; no deeper grief than a petulant dissatisfaction, the crumpled rose leaf on a bed of luxury. He wondered suddenly what gloom the great war shadow might be destined to cast on this brightness. Her next words, coming in conjunction with his thoughts, startled him:

"I say, what regiment will Johnny get into?"

"What did you say?"

"Of course, he's volunteered."

David felt a creeping chill.

"But," he went on—she was only a child, after all, and talking nonsense—"he only enters Sandhurst next year."

Peggy, between two whistles after a truant, cast a contemptuous phrase over her shoulder:

"As if Johnny'll wait for that!"

"But, my dear"—the man's countenance was furrowed with anxiety—"Johnny's not yet nineteen. It's absurd. They wouldn't have him."

"Why not? He has been in the training corps ever since he went to the 'Varsity."

They pursued their way in silence for a little while. David tried to put the unwelcome suggestion from him. In his eyes his brother was also still a child. It was quite absurd, he repeated to himself, and strove to shut his mind to the idea. But there are certain apprehensions that seize upon the spirit from the first moment unrelentingly.

"I hope," he said all at once, turning rather irritably towards her, "that you will not put any such ridiculous notion into his mind, that you will not write to stir him up."

"I"—Peggy stopped and flung back her head—"I ask him! I stir him up!" She surveyed him a moment with scornful eyes. "How little you know me! How little you understand!" this gaze of hers declared. Then she went on: "If Johnny does not do it of himself, I certainly will not suggest it."

Her tone was cutting. He understood very well what it conveyed. Johnny would not be what she thought him: she would not stoop to show him the way.

They parted at the gate. On both sides there was constraint and disapproval.

The perturbation in David's mind grew and spread. By the time he had reached Treowen there was not a cranny of his consciousness that was not invaded by an anxiety which had become conviction.

He did not hear from Johnny for some time; but that young man never was very good with the pen, and

in the present circumstances David found the silence reassuring rather than otherwise. The want of enthusiasm and earnestness which he had secretly regretted to notice in his brother's character, and which he had trusted might prove but a phase in adolescence, was now almost a comfort.

Johnny won't care enough, he told himself repeatedly. What had such a creature of the passing moment—as the boy had accurately described himself—to do in the ghastly seriousness of warfare? Johnny was nothing but a child still—the elder brother could not often enough repeat the assurance to himself—he was no more fit for manhood's duty than his yearling foals to bear the saddle.

A letter came at last. Before David opened it he had the instinct that it would deal him a blow. It is the penalty which intense natures such as his pay to Fate that the ordinary events of life, much less its extraordinary emergencies, strike at the vital point when they strike at an object loved. The elder brother had almost a woman's heart for the one darling of his affection.

Johnny wrote in the highest spirits :

“Well, Mr. Owen, whatever, it's all settled. I'm off to Caterham. You should just see me in my khaki! Wait till I come down and show it to Peg! Perhaps, indeed! The female mind, Davy dear, requires to be impressed. That is why the peacock—'tis a law of Nature. And Nature, Mr. Shepherd, you may have noticed, will have her way, in spite of all civilised man or woman may say. That's why I'm particularly set up at the thought of killing as many Germans as possible. I'm sending all the bills in to you, Davy bach, but a little cheque in addition would oblige.—Yours martially,

J. O.”

CHAPTER V

Hope at the Prow

TOWARD the middle of September there came a telegram from Johnny announcing his arrival :

"Forty-eight hours' leave coming Treowen don't tell Peggy"

David puzzled in vain over the injunction. There seemed to him only two possible explanations. Boy and girl lovers as they were, they had had a tiff; or else Johnny wanted to surprise her. Remembering the young man's remarks about khaki, David concluded for the latter reason. It came round always to the same thing: Johnny was a mere child in thought and feeling.

The elder brother had paid a visit to the camp to see the budding soldier and to assure himself that all was as it should be in the situation which was now inevitable. Johnny he had found in high, not to say fantastic, spirits; extremely popular, evidently; a little thinner, with a shade of tan over his fair skin, but more absurdly youthful-looking than ever. He seemed to be playing with war, much as he had played with his easygoing existence hitherto. David, oppressed with the long anxiety of the initial tragic week of the great struggle, every deep feeling stirred by Sir John French's first dispatch—just published—was surprised and puzzled by the light-hearted atmosphere he found at the camp. No one was anxious to discuss

news from the front. It seemed to David as if he was looked upon askance, as one who broaches a subject it were better taste to leave untouched, when he strove to elicit the opinion of experienced officers.

"Oh, that's all right."

"We'll do first-rate by and by."

"We'll worry through, never fear."

"Mons? A bit of a set-back there. Can't expect not to have a set-back at first. All right in the end."

The last thing these pleasant, bronzed, keen-eyed men wanted was to talk of casualties and strategic retreats.

"I know no more than you do yourself, my good sir," said the colonel. But he was ready to converse about horses with David, and was keen to narrate the pedigree of a certain mare. He grew so interested presently, in talking to the expert, that his manner became positively genial. A big cigar between his lips, he opined he'd run down when the fuss was over and visit the Treowen stud farm. "When we've had our flutter out there"—with a negligent wave of the hand.

But as David mentioned the visit of the young hunting Baron von Arnelius and the clean sweep he had made of the best stock, the colonel froze up again and sheered away from the unpleasant topic.

"I expect we have all, more or less, been damned fools!" he remarked, twisted his cigar between his lips and walked out of the hut toward the stables, whither he was about to conduct the visitor.

Was there really a profound indifference to the crucial situation and the immense responsibility flung upon an insufficient army? Or was it just because each man here knew himself in the forefront of tremendous events, an actor, a worker in the supreme business, that he could afford to seem detached? The readiness to give one's utmost, to the laying down of life itself,

the consciousness that man can do no more, imparts a wonderful liberty and serenity to the spirit.

David had received the promise of his commission, but he was not yet admitted to his post, and he found it very hard to settle to the routine of existence with the sense of the huge national suspense upon his soul, coupled with an acute personal, womanish fear for his brother.

Matters were, of course, at a standstill as far as the prospects of the mine were concerned. This was the least of David's troubles, but it entailed the continuance of his personal supervision of the farming, more especially as the call to camp might come at any moment. He was working, therefore, at double pressure to get all possible advantages out of the land before leaving it to less capable hands. He had known times when financial embarrassment was his sole trouble: now darkness absorbed shadow, for he took the war hard.

Johnny arrived early in the afternoon. He was much in his usual thistledown spirits—with occasional slight fits of musing. He insisted on immediately going out for a walk.

David wondered a little at first as his brother led him an erratic course from farmyard to stables, from sheepfold to sawmill. But, as he stood silently by while the few old servants of the estate exclaimed in admiration at the young man's splendid appearance in martial array, he had a smile for the harmlessness of youthful vanity: Johnny certainly did not take the war "hard."

Presently he found his course guided towards the oak wood where they had met after their father's funeral. Here Johnny fell into one of the abstractions the other had already noticed. David looked at the delicate, clear-cut face and the slight, well-knit figure very advantageously displayed in the khaki garb, and found

himself puzzling, as he had often puzzled before, what the thoughts might be that lay behind his brother's airy attitude.

The little boy who had come running to him in his new mourning had been a deep-feeling child under his reserve. The eighteen year old soldier baffled him by his persistent rattle and chaff.

"You remember?" said Johnny suddenly—he stopped and looked at David—"it was just here."

David had never passed that oak tree without remembering, but he thought the other had forgotten long ago.

"You were comfortable to me that day," went on Johnny. Then he added, with a small laugh, "You've always been uncommon comfortable to me, Davy dear."

The skyline behind the spreading lichened oak trunks was suffused with the faint pearly rose of a perfectly clear sunset. Johnny cast a look around.

"Dear old place," he said under his breath. "I say, let's go in."

The elder man's heart was heavy as they turned and walked back toward the house. Johnny began to whistle under his breath the inevitable, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary."

Like most Welshmen, David had a keen sense of music. He was not likely to forget the haunting, easy lilt that had assailed his ears from every side during his visit to Caterham camp—the tacitly accepted marching song of the British army. Why was Johnny whistling it now? The question trembled on his lips. He literally was afraid to put it.

Half an hour later he was sitting apart, listening to Johnny's absurd nonsense to Nanny.

Nanny had no hesitation on the score of inquiry.

She trusted to goodness Master Johnny would be staying quietly in England. To be sure, the Germans were dreadful people. If Nanny's advice were taken, our own soldiers should be kept to protect England and leave the French folk to look after France.

"Everybody for his country, Master Johnny. There's common sense."

"Ah, Nanny, what a pity you're not at the War Office!"

"Well, then, Master Johnny, indeed I'd tell them what I think, whatever," said Nanny, clattering a dish on the table. "'Tis common sense I ask for."

"Tell you what, Nanny," said the youthful soldier, "if ever I do go I'll bring you back one of the Kaiser's moustaches."

"Lord bless the dear child! And what would be the good of that to me?" Nanny asked, perfectly serious. "I'd rather you didn't go, my dear." She had a sudden trembling about the lips. Johnny laughed. He was lying tilted backwards in his chair, his feet against the edge of the dais. He lit another of the perpetual cigarettes.

"I'm as bad as any silly mother about her boy in the Yeomanry," thought David. "There's no question of his going. As if Johnny wouldn't have announced it in his first phrase!"

Johnny had shown a schoolboy interest in the supper—which was still the simple order of the evening at Treowen—and fell to with a schoolboy appetite on the tit-bits the old nurse had provided. Honey and hot cake, late strawberries and clotted cream. Nanny stood by, smoothing her apron and smiling on her favourite. As she looked, David saw her eyes suddenly swim in tears. She lifted her apron to her lips to hide the trembling that had seized them again, and went shuffling from the room.

"What's the matter with her?" cried David hotly.

Johnny did not answer. He dipped a large strawberry in the cream, sugared it to a nicety, and put it into his mouth.

"Did you say anything to her to upset her?" David's tone was still that of an angry man.

Johnny shook his head.

"I—indeed no, no, whatever, Mr. Owen!"

He got up from the table and walked to the window recess. Shadow time had passed and a lambent twilight filled the room. Johnny took out his cigarette case and began to whistle again.

"Oh, for God's sake——!" David leapt to his feet, knocking down the chair.

"Why not?" asked the other whimsically. "It's a jolly good tune to go off to, isn't it?"

"Johnny!"

"Congratulate me, Mr. Owen bach; I'm past my probation, and I'm part of the next draft."

There was silence for a moment, broken only by the scrape of Johnny's match. David took a deep breath.

"When do you start?" he asked quietly.

"To-morrow night," said Johnny.

Again for a while neither spoke. David came up to the dais and sat down on the window-seat.

"Why didn't you tell me at once?" he said at last, heavily.

The boy seemed to have some difficulty in managing his smoke. He puffed, examined, struck another match, then tossed the whole thing out through the window over his brother's shoulder.

"Jolly evening!" he exclaimed.

"Why didn't you want Peggy to know?"

"Davy dear, you are a man for questions!" said

Johnny, sitting down in his turn. "Do you know that you have begun every remark with 'why' these last five minutes?"

"You didn't want to say good-bye to Peggy. Don't you think that's rather hard on her, poor little girl?"

"No!" The answer was sharp.

David drew within himself. He was treading on unknown ground; the boy was more than ever an enigma to him now. Any sign of irritability was so rare from that easy, serene personality that it was disquieting. He knew his own anxiety to be almost unmanly; could it be possible that Johnny himself "minded" going to the front? But the next moment Johnny turned, and, in the half-gloom, David saw the young face assume an expression of wonderful sweetness. It was almost as if an inner light shone out.

"I say, I'm a beast to answer you like that, Davy; forgive me. I'm such an awful fool when it comes to talking about things—things that matter, you know—Peggy and such." He swung his legs, kicking softly against the panelling, and then began to sing under his breath, "It's a long, long way to Tipperary." "Beg pardon; you don't like it?"

He looked full at his brother. "It's just this: Peg's a child—she's not yet seventeen. It's because I don't want to make it harder for her if——"

Not since he was a boy had Johnny given his brother a real glimpse of his heart. He was giving him one now. And David looked, and pride and sorrow contended within him.

"I'm simply skipping with joy to be allowed to go, for myself," went on Johnny. The note of emotion had gone from his voice. He spoke in the old indifferent accents. "But it does not make matters any better or

any worse to pretend it isn't just a toss up, Mr. Owen. Colonel says he doesn't know what they're doing with all our fellows, over there. Twenty-three officers already, David, killed and wounded—no prisoners. That's a good old record to start with, isn't it? I say, Davy, I'll turn in rather soon. Got to be off by the milk train. I'm glad I came. It's been a nice day. Good-night, old man."

He got up, yawned, stretched himself. His tone, his eye forbade the smallest display of emotion.

David remained sitting while the darkness gathered round him and deepened, and then again imperceptibly lightened as the fair September night established its reign. The sky was studded with faint stars. The moon was setting : she was the colour of brass against the grey of the firmament. David thought there was something of monstrous and evil omen in the look of the world, placid and beautiful as it was in the still purity of the harvest evening. In his heart there was a profound darkness of melancholy. He had at last seen what Johnny was . . . and Johnny was going from him upon the doubt of that dreadful "if."

When the old woman came in to clear away, he got up and advanced towards her.

"Nanny, what is Master Johnny doing?"

Nanny was apparently in high good humour. Her withered cheeks were flushed; her tremendous cap was slightly awry—it looked as if Johnny had been hugging her. There was a reminiscent smile on her lips. But she began to scold volubly :

"And indeed, and I trust he's asleep, Master David. And indeed, Mr. Owen, sir, the poor child! Up at four o'clock this morning, he tells me; and off again in the morning, before the day is light. It's not right, Mr. Owen, sir, indeed. And it's a letter you ought to

be writing to the gentlemen that look after him. Master Johnny was never so strong, whatever. It'll be an illness he'll be having. Master David, there's thin he is. Twice as thin as last time, look you."

"Nanny!"

"Yes, sir?"

"Why did you look at Master Johnny like that at supper?"

"I, Master David?"

"Did you see anything, Nanny?"

She gave him a furtive look, her mouth worked; she caught up a napkin and shook it fiercely.

"See anything, Master David? What should I be seeing? There do be terrible tales in the newspapers, Master David. But there, isn't it the Lord that's upholding us?"

David remained silent. Presently he turned and went slowly to his room, taking off his boots at the foot of the stairs for fear the old, noisy boards should wake the sleeper.

Johnny went off by starlight. David had meant to drive him himself to the early train in the high dog-cart, but Johnny, catching wind of his intention over their snatched breakfast, stopped his chatter—he was very talkative and absurd that morning—to put a firm veto on the plan.

"Oh, Davy dear, railway station parting—so horrid! I do hate platform sentiment. I'd hate to see you standing there alone with the lamps winking yellow in the ugly dawn. Ugh! I'd much rather leave you standing in Treowen porch. Tell you what, you go and have a look at those sheep as soon as I'm off; or, rather, go and lunge that chestnut filly. You'll keep her for me, that dark chestnut filly, and I'll give her to Peg. Peg'll look a gem on her."

He talked on through David's stricken silence with rather more excitement than usual; and all the time kept coming round to what he would do when he came back. David felt as if the hand that had laid hold of his heart ever since that day in the avenue at Penarth was tightening its grip until the pain was unbearable.

As soon as the clipping sound of the hoofs of the famous trotter struck upon their ears from without Johnny was up, in the middle of a sentence. He took a final gulp of Nanny's foaming coffee, ran hither and thither, picking up his scattered goods, shook his brother's hand gaily up and down, and was out of the room, banging the door between them.

David stood, that horrible pain at his heart, looking at the closed door. He remembered the day when the two young things had run about all over the house; how he had felt shut off from their innocent joy by that clapping door, and how Johnny had come back and stood, swinging it, to tell him he wanted to be with him.

"Oh, God! would Johnny ever come back now?"

The goad of the thought started his misery into activity. He ran, stumbling out of the room into the dark passage, down the groaning staircase. There was one candle in the hall. Johnny was shaking himself into his big khaki coat.

He turned as David advanced and gave him a happy smile. David followed him out to the porch. There was a mist, through which the lights of the dog-cart shone prismatically.

Johnny jumped up, gathered the reins; the rough groom clambered behind him. The black horse was impatient and started off before the man had reached his seat. In another moment the whole thing was out of sight. The clean rhythm of the hoofs fell away, away,

and was lost.—David stood alone in the porch of Tre-owen, as Johnny had wished to leave him.

He had wanted a last word, but his throat had seemed to close. He had not even been able to say "God bless you."

CHAPTER VI

The Roll of Honour

AFTER what seemed to him very undue delay, David at last received official sanction to join the county Yeomanry. He was glad, not only to be relieved from the discomfort of not being yet in "the right place" at the moment of the national need, but also because he felt that the new work in comradeship would be a relief. No matter how strenuously a man may employ himself on his own estate, he cannot escape long hours of inaction when the year is setting towards winter. And it was during these long hours that anxiety fell most unbearably upon David in his lonely home. Evening after evening he would sit poring over papers and maps, striving to follow the fortunes of England; striving to guess the spot where might be that soldier in the great army in whom his hopes centred, the unit in those thousands that was his all. . . . Was Johnny in the trenches? Was he now in the firing line? Were the shells breaking over him? . . . What was he doing just this moment, laughing or eating or smoking his cigarette . . . or lying wounded, suffering, wandering, lost, God knew;—perhaps breathing his last sigh? If it rained here, did it rain over there? If the rain fell and the wind blew on these Welsh hills, how did it fare with his boy yonder? Was he cold and drenched, out under the unknown skies? Johnny was none so strong, as the old nurse said. If the white mists crept close round the house, was it spreading, too, over Flanders,

covering some treacherous advance of the enemy? The old empty house was full of whispers and moanings and mysterious noises, but its chief haunting for David was ever that bright presence. It went in and out with him, sat with him at every meal, threaded every dream; but it was never so poignantly vivid as during his desolate night watches.

Yet the sense of imminent calamity had passed from David's mind. No healthy, outdoor man is like to fall a prey to morbid foreboding. The wrench of farewells was over; Johnny had written once or twice in excellent spirits; the papers were, on the whole, optimistic; there was a lull in the British casualty lists.

When he received his orders to report himself within forty-eight hours at Salisbury camp, he felt like a new man. For the first time since the war had begun a cheerfulness settled on his spirits. He could have said with Romeo, "My bosom's lord sits lightly on his throne."

He was putting by and locking up his papers, preparatory to departure, when the girl Madlen came in, a telegram in her hand: Nanny was washing and had sent her underling to the door. When he saw the orange-coloured envelope, the blood stopped running in his veins. Then he flung back the terror with a laugh—had he not had a dozen telegrams these last three weeks, and was he going to be a fool over every one?

"Waiting for an answer?" he asked, and Madlen, hurrying back to the imperious claims of the washtub, answered hastily:

"The boy has gone"; adding, to explain, "he was a strange boy indeed."

As the door clapped David opened the envelope. He stood quite still, reading and re-reading with starting eyes:

"Regret to inform you Second Lieutenant J. C. Owen has been killed."

Second Lieutenant J. C. Owen—did they mean Johnny? John Cecil Owen—that was his name; it must mean Johnny! *Killed?* That meant that Johnny was dead. Johnny!

Nanny came in. She gave one look at her master where he stood holding the sheet. She had no need to ask what had stricken him: the death tidings were written on his face. Her sudden wail roused him. He cast upon her a staring look and said in a voice devoid of emotion:

"Johnny is killed." Then, with an immense effort, like one forced to explain something incomprehensible: "That means Johnny is dead," he added.

That night she crept softly into his room to see if he slept. She had lit a fire there—a luxury he had not allowed himself all these years. He did not turn his head on the pillow or seem to be aware of her presence. Coming closer to look she saw that his eyes were open and fixed. He was gazing, gazing far beyond her. The old woman shuddered and went whimpering back to her room. She felt cold to the heart.

Next morning early David went up to London. It is hard to kill hope. There had been two corrections in the casualty lists that same day—officers whose names had appeared among the dead were now reported wounded and prisoners. He met Sir Gwydyr at the station. The kindly gentleman was full of concern when he heard David's bad news, and instantly offered to accompany him to the War Office. He had a friend there, and by his favour they were able to get beyond the relentless official barrier. Johnny's name, it seemed, had come

in with that of several other young officers. Further details had come that very morning: the information precluded all possibility of mistake. David took the blow with perfect quietness. Perhaps he had not really had any vital hope: only the poor ghost that had to be laid before his manhood could grapple with its sorrow.

Sir Gwydyr looked nervously two or three times at the set face that seemed a mask of grey granite. He was a warm-hearted, good-natured man, and had blown his nose two or three times as they went out of the great building.

"Poor lad, poor lad! We all loved him. Little Peg there—she'll miss her playfellow!"

They were now in the wide, cold street; a gusty wind was driving bits of paper along the pavement and sending eddies of dust into their faces.

"Confounded wind!" said Sir Gwydyr, and made play with his handkerchief to his eyes.

His heart was sore for his young neighbour and for the boy who had been as a child of his own house. He did not like to think of little Peggy missing her playmate; like most fathers, he had not the vaguest idea that there could be anything more between them, as, indeed, was only natural considering their years.

"I'm very much obliged to you," said David. "There's just one thing: I'd like to resign that commission in the Yeomanry."

"Hey?" cried Sir Gwydyr, turning round in astonishment. A dark flush overspread his sanguine countenance. "Give up? Tut, tut! You mean—I can't have understood."

"I must get out of it," said David. He did not raise his voice or emphasise the words, yet the effect upon Sir Gwydyr was as a cry of desperation. He stared and

stammered; his empurpled countenance convulsed between wrath and horror.

"You're thinking of Treowen, I suppose?" he said at last, harshly.

David did not seem to hear him. He was looking at Sir Gwydyr with sombre eyes—the eyes of a man who has been struck a mortal blow: the eyes of a man who means to strike back.

"It comes to this," he said, "I can't wait."

"You——"

"I can't wait, I say. I must get out—out there—at once. I don't care how. I'll go as a private. I'll enlist in anything so long as I can get out at once."

Sir Gwydyr took off his hat, wiped his forehead and drew a long breath. He was ashamed of himself for having doubted an Owen. Poor lad, poor lad! It was very natural. He felt like that himself. He began then to explain, very elaborately, rather longwindedly, what a mistake it would be for David to allow himself to be led away by his feelings. It was every man's duty now to think of the example he was giving to the community at large. David was doing the very best thing he could do in joining the county Yeomanry. That was the way to induce those farmer fellows to do their duty.—Prominent man, proper place—resignation would produce bad effect.—Class influence completely lost if he sank himself among the ranks.

"Every man in his right place," repeated Sir Gwydyr, patting his companion's stiffened shoulder.

David listened till the end. A little while ago (he faintly recalled) he too had thought this a sound doctrine—every man in his right place. Now he knew there are things a man can do and things he cannot.

"I can't wait," he said again.

Sir Gwydyr snorted and puffed. He opened his mouth for a fresh harangue, shot another glance at

David and shut it with a snap. As well try and turn iron at white heat with your naked hand as argue with a man in such a state. Sir Gwydyr could not even feel the anger such folly deserved. He said good-bye with a disapproving sympathy and betook himself to his own affairs.

CHAPTER VII

Renunciations

DAVID started back for Treowen, having carried out his purpose. He had still twenty-four hours' freedom to put order into his affairs. As the express ran its easy way through the darkness he began to jot down his notes. He must send for Trevor Williams and make a new will. Treowen was nothing to him now. It was only a frigid sense of duty that drove him to safeguard the interests of old dependents on the estate when it should pass into the hands of that distant cousin whom he only knew by name.

With Johnny's death his own real life had died too. Nothing could hurt him, nothing could touch him, displease, annoy or grieve him ever again. The world and all it held had become a place of vast indifference to him—grey, featureless, blotted out; the house he had loved so passionately, a mere pile of stone—the cairn above the grave. There was only one sensation vital, one desire active, one thought predominant—to go out and kill where Johnny had been killed.

The return to Treowen was a cruel test of endurance. Every moment he was stabbed to a fresh agony of realisation: the coming back to the house that was the shell of his dead hopes, Nanny's face at the door, the rooms that had held Johnny, that were to have held him all his life and echoed to his children's voices. . . . It was terrible to sit on by the dying fire in the very chair Johnny had tilted back against the dais that last evening

when the sky had been first like a great opal and then turned grey as glass, and the moon had come out deep-hued as copper. It was worse still to have to drag his misery to bed, with heavy tread that set the old stairs groaning, and remember how he had come up in stockinged feet lest he should wake Johnny—Johnny whom nothing would ever wake now.

The night was dreadful too. A score of pictures chased each other across his sleepless brain, each one a fresh presentation of his boy's death. Had he lingered? Had there been anyone with him? . . . Had he wanted his brother? Johnny to want help, and he, David, not to be there to give it!

He fell into slumber at last and dreamed heavily. He dreamed himself back to the old scene in the wood, with Johnny running to him through the sunlight and shadow and clinging to him, his tears against his face. And he woke and groaned and had no tears, only a pain at his heart that was actually physical.

But in the morning it was the worst of all. Two things happened that were almost beyond bearing to such an affection and such a sorrow as his. The first was a letter from Johnny, dated ten days back. It was scrawled on a leaf torn from a notebook in scarcely legible pencilling.

"Have not a moment, Davy, dear. Getting on first-rate. We keep moving on. It is jolly weather. The men are just splendid. It isn't being half alive to be stuck in England. Tell my Peg—Davy, dear, just called off. No time to finish.
JOHNNY."

It had taken David all the courage he had to open the envelope addressed in Johnny's characteristic scrawl, stamped with the official pass. But when he had forced himself to read, his empty heart cried out for something more, something intimate, something to treasure till he

died. Was this to be Johnny's last message—just these few careless lines with their boyish valour? Was nothing more personal, no word of love, ever to reach him again? Was the Great Silence to fall between them just on this: "Tell my Peg—" ? There was sweetness in those three words, but it was for another.

For the first time, the lonely man with his single thought, his single devotion, had a twist of jealousy. The next moment his true nature asserted itself. The infinite pathos of that broken message superseded all other thought. Poor little girl! If this were all for her too!

He was reading and re-reading the scrap of paper when Peggy herself burst in upon him. It was the second ordeal of the morning.

She came in like a whirlwind.

"What's this about Johnny? What's this nonsense about Johnny?"

"My dear——"

She ran to him, caught him by the arm, shook him. Her action reminded him of some small, savage dog in a fury.

"You needn't look at me like that. I don't believe it! Father said"—she choked—"father said you had a telegram." Her voice rose shrilly. "Show it to me, show it to me this minute!"

She stamped her foot. Her face, gone to half its size, with fever spots on each cheek, looked like a painted mask of itself.

"Peggy, dear, let me call Nanny."

"Give me that telegram. Don't be a fool! No, don't hold me. I'm not ill, or mad, or anything. Show me that telegram!"

He took it from his breast pocket—fatal, horrible message as it was, it was yet part of Johnny; he had kept it close to him. She snatched it from his hand.

"Regret to inform you Second Lieutenant J. C. Owen has been killed," she read in a high monotonous voice. Then she wheeled upon him: "You believe that—you?"

"I've been to the War Office." He felt instinctively that nothing but the truth, plain, unvarnished, would serve here.

"The War Office! You believe the War Office? They know nothing really about things. Why, the Carnabys went into mourning for their son, Lewis, and all the time he was alive and quite well, not even wounded, not even missing. You must want to believe bad news if you believe the War Office!"

She grew more and more excited as she spoke. Her voice broke in its emphasis; the words came stumbling against each other, scarcely intelligible. "How *can* you say Johnny's dead? How *could* Johnny die—Johnny? He's alive, I *know* he's alive! You can't kill a man like him that way. I'd easier believe we were all dead than Johnny!"

She was only expressing in her childish fashion what David himself had felt ever since the blow had been struck. It was an impossible thing to think of Johnny as dead—inconceivable! He knew of the established fact, and yet it took all his reason to force himself to accept it. That anyone so instinct with young, eager life should all at once have ceased to be!

"Peggy, listen to me——"

He could not let her feed upon the delusion. There was something too piteous in her futile fight against the relentlessness of fate; he could not quickly enough bring about the inevitable surrender. Any depth of sorrow was preferable to this useless agony of revolt.

"Peggy, listen to me," he said again. "You must listen to me. I myself saw the dispatch. It was from

the brigadier. Johnny and three of his brother officers were brought in dead after a splendid and successful charge. We may be sure, my dear, that Johnny fell gallantly."

She was listening, her face averted, forced into silence by his stronger will; but he could feel how she shook from head to foot. The little arm he held was tense and quivering.

"I can't believe it!" she wailed at last. Her resistance had fallen to its last pathetic stronghold. "I can't feel it!"

He hesitated a moment, then, with a harshness that betrayed what it cost to speak the words:

"The dispatch went on to say that they had buried him."

She gave a scream that echoed round the house and pierced him to the marrow. It was as if his own dumb grief had found voice at last. He thought that she must fall and opened his arms. But her attitude was still one of fight.

How had it happened? How had God allowed it to happen? There could not be a God if He had allowed it to happen! Why should Johnny be taken—Johnny? Johnny, the dearest, the kindest, who had never had a thought but what was good. And those devils to be allowed to live! Nobody knew Johnny as she did. He would have been a man in a million—and she had prayed, oh, she had prayed and she had believed what the Gospel said: "If you have faith——" She had had faith. She had trusted! "Oh"—she turned on him with accusing eyes—"how can I ever pray again? Don't you see, it's all gone! Johnny and all I believed in."

He stood looking at her helplessly. He could neither rebuke nor find words of comfort. Was she not still putting into words what he inarticulately felt?

Her cry rose again. This time it was the dead she arraigned, but the anger had left her accents. They were full of poignant reproach.

"He went away without bidding me good-bye. Oh, why—why did he do that? Not even to have a last look, a last word!"

"He thought it would make it less hard for you," faltered David. She made a movement of her hand, as if she would have struck him.

"Don't dare say he thought I could forget him—that he would have wanted me to forget him! I'd have married him before he went out, I would. Oh, if I were his widow I could have borne it better!"

She was altogether broken now. David knew that he was himself at the extreme limit of endurance. He had very little knowledge of humanity at all, except in his relation of master to servant. He could look back now on all those years when he might have drawn close to his brother, might have got to know him intimately and be known in return, as wasted. He had always had a difficulty in, almost an incapacity for communicating his feelings and thoughts to others.

What could he say to this child? Out of the immense aridity of his own desolation, how lay hold of a single word of balm? He saw her fragile spring joy and loveliness, as it were, devastated before him; Johnny and she, those two fresh creatures, stricken in the blossom of their harmless youth; his own sacrifice in vain; his long, silent labours wasted too. It was all waste, waste! Did he not, too, in that deepest pit of his heart's misery, doubt and rebel?

He took up the letter he had been reading—that faint scrawl from the battlefield—and put it into her hand. It was right she should read it; he could think of nothing else to do or say.

"What is it?" she asked him angrily.

"Johnny's last letter, written ten days before.—Oh, no, I don't suppose there'll be anything more—ever. But in that there's something about you!"

"About me?"

She ran to the window-seat with it, carrying it away with her. Then the cry broke out again.

"'Tell my Peg'—— Oh, what? How can I bear it?"

It was, perhaps, the impotent sorrow with which he gazed at her that melted the fierceness and revolt from her wounded, childish heart. She suddenly cast herself against his breast and burst into wild sobs.

"Oh, Johnny's brother, what shall I do—Johnny's brother!"

CHAPTER VIII

"Johnny's Widow"

SHE had wept herself out at last. She lay in his arms like a wilted thing; the wild flower crushed. He had thought already she was like some blossom of the field or hill in her delicate vividness. Now the likeness went farther: nothing breaks or fades so quickly. He held her, sitting in the great chair, as if she had been a little child, forgetting himself in his yearning pity. As always, it was the paternal instinct which rose strongest within him.

Pictures out of the past were flitting through his mind. . . . Johnny chasing Peggy in the fresh spring grass: two butterflies dancing in the sunshine. Johnny, his arms about her, captive, looking up laughing at the window. He remembered that he had turned his eyes away abashed. Oh, God, that he would never have the lovely, innocent vision again! . . . Peggy in the avenue, a bright figure in the dappled light, tossing her proud head at him, scornful that he should throw doubt for a moment upon her boy-lover's readiness. It was upon this remembrance that his tired mind awoke at last to alacrity. Here was something he could appeal to—Peggy's pride.

"Tell me," he said, bending down, "would you rather he hadn't gone?"

With a sudden movement she pushed herself away with both hands against his breast. Her small, weary face, tear-stained, pallid and disfigured, looked startled;

the glance she shot at him through swollen lids mutely reproached. “How can you ask such a thing?” it seemed to say.

“He needn’t have gone, you know.”

“Needn’t!—Oh!”

“You would not have kept him back, then, by a word? You would not wish him back now—to keep him safe?”

She understood him in a flash, got off his knee, straightened herself, looked at him full.

“Thank you,” she said in a low voice. “I see now I’m making myself unworthy of him. No, I wouldn’t have him back—at that price.”

“Nor would I,” said David with a great sigh.

He rose too, as if in respect to the gallant dead. The light he had striven to fling upon her darkness was shining on his own soul. They had both something to hold on to. There is a claim beyond those of love and youth and life, a privilege dearer than happiness. Johnny had leaped to the claim, and the privilege was his.

“God had no better gift,” said David at last.

She put out her hand and clutched his with fingers cold as ice.

“I will be worthy of him,” she said. “I’ll always be Johnny’s. I’m Johnny’s widow in my heart.” He could have smiled over the child if it had not been for the infinite pathos of it. “It won’t be easy,” she went on, looking at him, “but I mean what I say. I’ll never marry anybody. I’ll keep myself for Johnny.”

The man breathed another long sigh, but it was one of relief. Peggy’s innocent faith had come back to her. She went over to the window and took up the letter once more, and once more read the few lines through.

“Wasn’t he splendid? Wasn’t he simple and brave?” Tears poured down her cheeks, but there was a

faint smile on her lips. "Tell my Peg——' Oh, David, I've always got that." She kissed the grey sheet, then refolded it carefully and slipped it into her breast. "I'll always keep it—always. It shall be my wedding ring."

David said no word. It would be a brute who would have taken that comfort from her, though it was all he had himself—Johnny's last letter.

* * * * *

With the anomalous courage of a nervous woman, Lady Celia liked her car to be driven at full speed.

"What are you goin' so slowly for?" she cried to the chauffeur that morning as the steep road that led to Treowen necessarily modified the usual pace. Without turning his head, the man, accustomed to her imperious vagary, changed his gear. The scream and throb of the rate at which the hill was now devoured reached David and Peggy in the oak parlour; and immediately the horn sounded.

"It's mother," said the girl, stiffening. She put her hands to her dishevelled hair, tucked it back under her riding hat and pulled the brim over her eyes. "I hate mother to see me crying," she said, and gave a quick glance at her companion. "Mother couldn't understand. I never talk to her."

The three abrupt sentences contained a warning, which David instantly apprehended. He understood but too well the shrinkings of a reserved nature. Both hurried downstairs to the stone hall; and he went forward to open the doors as the car ground itself into stillness outside.

Very sumptuous and beautiful Lady Celia looked as she swept in in her sables. The wind had whipped carnations into her cheeks; her hair shone with tawny

reflections repeated in her furs. Her golden eyes looked distraught, reproachful and indignant all at once.

“Oh, Peggy, how could you?” she began, then broke off. The tears leaped, the corners of her lips went down. “Oh, my poor little girl!” she cried. The small face, so woebegone, was too much for her mother’s heart. She caught Peggy into her arms. “Oh, my poor little Peggy! Oh, David, this dreadful war! It’s too horrible. Oh, why did you let him go out? All our best! Such boys! Not nineteen! It’s insane!”

Peggy withdrew quietly, deliberately. Once more her eyes sought David’s. There was perfect sympathy between them.

“I’m sorry if you’re anxious, mother dear.” Her voice was sweet and cold, like a flute. “I had to come and find out about Johnny.” She paused and went on steadily: “I’d better ride back, I think.”

She was perfectly courteous, but David wondered at the immense distance he saw gaping between mother and child. Lady Celia seemed to perceive nothing. She held her daughter affectionately embraced; her beautiful eyes roamed, misted with tears. She was biting her under lip to stay its quivering. Glad to seize upon the suggestion of immediate departure, she answered with alacrity:

“If you’d rather ride, dawlin’—yes, I think we’d better go. I was anxious, you see,” she said apologetically to David. “I don’t like her ridin’ by herself. And I wanted just to say a word to you to—to—”

She could not get on. It was not so much because of her emotion as that she was desperately discomfited by the atmosphere of the house of mourning. “It will do Peggy good to ride back,” she began again vaguely. “I hope she has not bored you—upset you, I mean,” correcting herself. “Run, dawlin’, and get your pony.

You can keep close behind. I'll tell him to go slow, though I hate it."

"Good-bye," said Peggy. She held out her hand stiffly to David. "Father told us you are off. When do you go?"

"By the early morning train." David had fallen back into his usual undemonstrative way. She nodded.

"I wish I could go too," she said, so low that he alone heard it, and ran out of the hall.

Lady Celia gathered her furs about her with an air of relief; yet she lingered.

"Peggy's a queer child," she said, her troubled eyes fixing David. "You'd think, to hear her now, she wasn't feelin' anythin', yet she seems to have put herself in a dreadful state." As he made no reply, she pursued hurriedly: "Of course, she's a child, a mere child! She'll soon forget, please God!" Perhaps the sound of her own words smote her, for she went on, plaintiveness trailing in her tones: "One wouldn't wish her not to forget, poor lamb, would one? It isn't as if anythin' could bring the dear boy back. God knows I——"

For the third time speech failed her. It was really impossible to go on so unencouraged. David's silence fell upon her like a pall. She was glad to hurry into the car.

Peggy, sitting very erect on her cob, trotted on without turning her head. David remained in the porch, looking after them, as only a few weeks ago he had stood and seen Johnny drive away into the cold mist. He wondered. Would it be as Lady Celia said? Would Peggy forget? Would no one remember but himself? And for how little a while that might be, unless the stones of Treowen kept the past in dreams.

Book II

VIVIANNE

*" . . . As though she had a spirit of dead joy
About her, looked the sorrows of her ways."*

—LIONEL JOHNSON.

Book II

CHAPTER I

A Waif on Our Shores

"AH," said the little Baronne Hollebeke, "how well one is here! Ah, how it does one good!"

It was after dinner. The great drawing-room at Penarth was full of light and flowers; Lady Celia's chrysanthemums were famous, and electric fittings, artfully concealed in the cornices of the ceiling, flung a brilliance like tempered sunshine. She liked to have all the lights turned on. It was characteristic of her that, in good times given to fits of unnecessary economy and to perpetual grievances upon merest trifles, since the whole world was in trouble she was determinedly lavish and optimistic.

"I think," she proclaimed, "it's everybody's duty to cheer up."

So she cheered up with exquisite garments and a perpetual succession of guests.

She now gave an approving smile to the small Belgian lady and, looking charming in sweeping grey satin, took a chair opposite her.

She had had some misgivings in offering hospitality to these distinguished refugees, lest their company should prove irremediably depressing. But *noblesse oblige*,—hackneyed but irreplaceable motto! She could not contemplate the idea of hanging back when others

of her position were to the fore; the obligation, moreover, was obvious.

She was agreeably surprised to find that two of the three ladies allotted to her were sprightly young women, quite ready to be distracted, and to keep the happy, healthy children they had brought with them tactfully in the background. The third grown-up member of the party—a pale slip of a girl—was indeed silent, and looked, Lady Celia thought, dismal. But no one expected a *jeune fille* to put herself forward; and this was probably the conventional attitude.

It was the first evening after dinner. Madame Hollebeke was already much impressed by her entertainment and frankly said so. "Oh, my sister and I," she went on, "we said to ourselves just now, we have a chance—oh, but a chance! You are so good in England to us. But, up to this, *ces dames* put on long faces the moment they speak to us. It is their good heart—to let us know they are sorry for us; we quite understand. Only," she sighed, "it makes us sad at once. One remembers, on the instant, all. But here, in a minute, you make us forget. *Tenez*, I have not heard my sister laugh like that since—ah, *mon Dieu!*—those days before—before everything."

"Oh, we've quite enough over here to make us miserable, too, if we let ourselves go," said Lady Celia in her discontented, soft drawl. "But why let go?—that's what I say. Everybody wants distracting and cheering more than ever they did. I'm not going to give up having good things to eat and seeing my friends and wearing pretty clothes just because we are fighting those horrible Germans."

"Ah, clothes!" echoed Madame Hollebeke, with a moan. "Alas! all my trunks—where are they? My sister and I, we have but a few rags."

Lady Celia surveyed her dreamily. "Very nice

rags," she said after a pause. She wondered how the effect was managed; for, no doubt, the little woman was effective. A few black draperies, a wisp of white tulle, a fluffy head, a three-cornered face and a row of good pearls. There was very little more, but the combination was distinctly fascinating.

"They've got a something," thought the beautiful hostess. "Not half as good looking as we are—little high-shouldered things—but it sparkles somehow. They tie themselves together with an air."

No doubt the dinner to-night had been gayer than usual. The "poor refugees" had babbled and cackled and enjoyed the good cheer. And old Penpergan and her own Sir Gwydyr and that nice, wounded Captain Muirhart they had brought with them had been stirred to a liveliness unwonted in the Briton. The sisters, she noticed, were very like each other, only the Comtesse de Tirlemont was more emphatic. Her hair was blonder and fuzzier; her face had a sharper angle; she had bigger pearls; she was larger altogether, and her manner was more exuberant. She was talking very volubly now to Grace Caerleon; and, judging by Grace's expression, it was probably about horrors. Well, it might distract Grace from perpetually worrying over her husband just because he happened to be at the front—and it wasn't a bit of good to begin to worry before bad news came—but Lady Celia did not want to catch any word of the horrors; so she began to converse herself to drown them.

"I said to my husband at the very beginning, 'No, I'm not going to be economical.' You know what men are, how they begin to fuss over things that may never happen. I'm just going to spend as much money as ever I did. I know there's plenty," she added emphatically, "and I'm really spending a great deal more, of course. Money's pouring out—what with the

poor Flemish people in the village and the hospital we have started for convalescents and all; and having given our London house for the wounded, and the things we have to do for my husband's corps, and the funds—the national funds and all our local ones—of course it's pouring! But what I feel is—Penarth is cheery!”

“Ah, I believe you!” cried Madame Hollebeke. She was glad of the pause to slip in a remark—Lady Celia's flow was difficult to interrupt. “Oh, the relief to feel like one does here—like every day, you know! To be helped to forget, not pushed to remember!”

“Exactly.” Lady Celia had a way of rolling her candid golden eyes as she spoke. She rolled them now, a smile of approval curling her lips. Then her glance became fixed and the pleased expression wavered. Her lively companion instantly sought explanation.

Hands folded on her lap, with downcast lids and small, set, white face, the girl whom she and her sister had brought with them sat apart—an image of brooding misery.

“*Hein!*” exclaimed the Baronne, “that is not one who will help you to forget. What a face! Oh, she is *assommante!* We had enough of her, I assure you. But what could we do? We had to take her with us, and the more because her father was a relation of my husband. We ought to stuff her in a convent. Let us put her into a convent. She can cry there—one can cry very well in a convent. All the nuns will sigh when she cries. It will go beautifully. They will all be pleased. But the worst is, my husband made me swear not to lose sight of her. Still—in a convent—what do you say?”

“Oh, no,” drawled Lady Celia. “Poor thing! Of course, I'm delighted to keep her. We'll cheer her up.”

She spoke without conviction, however; her com-

panion promptly chimed in with the tone, not the words, of her remark :

"Ah, no, impossible ! How could one expect it ? Poor girl ! All are dead certainly, and that is not the worst ! And she has seen things."

The other hesitated, curiosity warring against the disinclination to hear unpleasant things. She glanced once more towards the retired corner where the girl sat in a small, low chair ; and, as she looked, interest stirred unexpectedly within her.

Lady Celia did not think Mademoiselle Vivianne de Flesselles pretty or attractive ; but, on closer examination, her strangeness caught and held the attention. Masses of dark red hair, in almost unnatural luxuriance, were divided and hung in heavy plaits each side of the narrow face. The face itself was bloodless, with an opaque pallor that did not look unhealthy, but unearthly. Though the features were delicate, the expression of the countenance was so rigid that nothing youthful seemed left. Straight, heavily-marked eyebrows gave a frowning intensity to eyes which were deeply shadowed about, and had the fixed look of one whose thoughts are far away.

"She reminds me," said Lady Celia, "of an alabaster statue I have seen in a church somewhere. It had red marble hair.—It had," she repeated, as her companion laughed shrilly. "I cannot leave her sitting alone like that. It looks so unkind."

She rose and approached the solitary guest. The girl got up slowly. Her eyes looked very dark in her pale face as she turned them on her hostess.

"Won't you come over and talk to us ?" suggested Lady Celia in her most caressing voice.

"No, thank you, madame." It was a low, deep voice that spoke, but it was curiously toneless. "If you please, I prefer to remain where I am."

"But you look so lonely," persisted Lady Celia. She withdrew, however, before the expression that came into the gaze uplifted to her. Annoyed and discomfited, she resumed her seat beside the Baronne. The girl sank back into her former attitude.

"Marble outside, if you will," cried Madame Hollebeke, briskly taking up the conversation where it had been dropped, "but, underneath, something is devouring her. If you ask me, I think she rages."

"Rages?" Lady Celia could not help being interested. It was true. The look that had driven her away had been inimical, wellnigh fiercely resentful.

"Ah, *il y a bien de quoi*. Think what has happened!"

"What happened?" She was bound to have it in the end, she might as well have it now.

Grace and the Comtesse were laughing, and she herself was very comfortable, with a cushion just at the right angle, the wood fire burning to perfection; and the Baronne was amusing.

"The worst is," cried the latter, lowering her voice, "nobody knows really: one only guesses. Of course, one knows the castle was burned, consumed down to the last stone. That—oh, that was a pity! An historic place, full of treasures—one of the most beautiful properties on the Meuse. The treasures they took away, of course—everything they could transport; and then they burnt it, as I say, to the last stone. She saw that, the poor little Vivianne, when she was in the village. Ah, and the village, too—what she saw there! They were like mad devils, those Germans, because of the first defeats. They made an example. You have heard what happens when they make an example—men, women and children, old and young, all pass. What she must have seen!"

"Did she tell you?" Lady Celia spoke reluctantly.

"Tell? That one? Not a word. Oh, it was not what you call cheery, all those days, with her sitting just as you see her now. *Ma foi!* it makes one feel worse that she tells nothing. One would rather she spoke. It gives one cold in the back. One feels, you know, that she is looking, looking, morning and night, always on—on the *things!* One sees them there before her. Ugh! That is why I say—put her in a convent."

"The things?" repeated Lady Celia, fascinated and horrified. The Baronne had a vivid fashion of speaking. Her whole countenance supplemented the vagueness of her words so eloquently that the listener began to feel something herself of that cold in the back.

"The things, *mon Dieu!*—the things without name."

There was a deep pause. Lady Celia turned her gaze once more on that motionless figure; she began to wish that she *could* "put it into a convent." What effect would this girl have upon her Peggy when the latter returned from her round of visits?—Lady Celia had prescribed this remedy as infallible against any possible continuance of undue regret for Johnny. All the relatives to whom Peggy had been confided in turn had received the injunction, "Keep her going." She was to return on the morrow; the mother confidently expected, cured. But children of that age were so imitative—if there was going to be such a picture of brooding perpetually before her eyes, of course Peggy would start brooding too. And then, when the girls got together, confidences might be worse.

"I hope," cried Lady Celia, with more energy than usual, "that the young lady—Mademoiselle de Flesselles—won't try and describe those things without name when she gets intimate with my girl."

"She!" Madame Hollebeke gave her little scream. She stopped suddenly: from the distance, the object of their remarks had raised her eyes and was looking

toward the sofa. The little woman, disconcerted, moved restlessly and seemed unable to recover the thread of the intended discourse.

"*C'est qu'elle vous a un regard!*" she murmured. Then, bending forward, whispered: "She couldn't have heard, could she? No, impossible. What was I saying? Ah, I remember. You have anxieties for your daughter, lest Vivianne should talk too much. Oh, it is everything that is most natural. But what can she say, since she knows nothing——"

"But I thought," helplessly interpolated the mother, "you said she had seen—that she was still looking at things."

"Ah, but yes—*écoutez!*—it is just that makes it so terrible. No one knows; she least of all, poor innocent! But she feels, she guesses—it is that that is killing, her, the unfortunate! For us, too, it was killing when we had nothing but her. No, never fear; she will not speak—and no one can tell what one does not know, anyhow."

Moderately reassured, Lady Celia kept silent, and Madame Hollebeke went on:

"I wish she would speak, it would relieve her, *pauvre petite*. But never, never; not a word. That is how it has taken her. Why, not even to us. And, after all, we are relations; she has no one else left, *la malheureuse*, who can help her. It was the old man who told us all."

"The old man?"

"Ah, then, it is evident you know nothing! Those good ladies of the committee, I thought they would have put you *au courant*, but they have so much work, so much work in their kind interest about us, they cannot remember everyone's story, much less write it. *Du reste*, it is not so long, and it is not already so strange. Ah, *par exemple*, we have taken warning, we others;

we do not stay in our châteaux to let them come upon us like wild beasts. At first, you see, we said: 'It is war; *eh bien, tant pis!* After all, it is war between civilised people. However well our men fight—and they have fought very well—we know, of course, our little army cannot keep them out. Well, they will come, and it will be like in other wars—the populations will be safe. Ah, well, we know now! As for Vivianne—the Château de Flesselles, how they burned it, I have told you. How they destroyed the village, I have told you, too. They said someone had shot at them—the gamekeeper, perhaps, one can never tell. In great force they were. And the officer in command he was in a fury; like a devil, as he rode up to the great door. The Comtesse de Flesselles, the mother of Vivianne, she was there alone to receive them. It is the *maître d'hôtel*, the old servant born in the family, who saved the girl. It was he who told me. Ah, the mother was a beautiful woman—a Pole—a Princess Orlenska; her husband adored her. He was my husband's cousin, I have told you; poor fellow, he died and left her a widow, quite young. *Grande et belle*, and still youthful to look at; I admired her more than I can say. Vivianne is not like her. The other daughter, she resembled the mother."

"The other daughter!" There had been a note of emotion in the speaker's voice over these words which affected Lady Celia to extreme discomfort. "What happened to her?"

Madame Hollebeke spread out her hands.

"It is that that is so terrible. Nobody knows. *Mon Dieu!* she was a dream of beauty and grace. When the old man—the poor old Fernand—saw how it was with those brutes, he fled with *la petite*. It was after dinner. They were all drunk, *ces Bosches de malheur*. The poor mother, she cried out to him in Walloon:

‘Run, run with Vivianne!’ He got away with her, through the woods, into the village, and in the end they reached us. *Pauvre* Fernand, he was so faithful, he would not stay with us in safety. He left Vivianne in our charge at Ostend, and nothing would persuade him but he must return to his mistress. He promised to write. But, *pas un mot de lui*. He is certainly dead too.”

“But the other—why couldn’t he save both girls at least?” Lady Celia heartily wished she had not encouraged the narration. She disliked feeling as she did now—quite upset; haunted by the thought of the sister left behind—the dream of grace and charm—and her unknown fate.

“Ah, the poor old man—how was it possible? He did what he could. The little one was in bed with a cold. She lodged in a *tourelle*. They had not yet got to it; they were so occupied below!”

“And so the mother and the other daughter”—Lady Celia wanted to get away from the dreadful tale, yet she clung still to the faint hope of reassurance—“they can’t have killed them!”

Madame Hollebeke’s eyes fixed the soft, fair, frowning face that bent towards her. Then she said dryly:

“Better it is not to discuss the things that the *Bosches* do—what is the good? What is done is done. We know they are dead, and I, for one, say, thank God!”

“Things—things!” Lady Celia got up—the opening of the door and the appearance of the gentlemen gave her the opportunity. “Things, horrid word; I shall never be able to bear it again,” she thought.

Lord Penpergan entered, smiling and rubbing his hands; his prominent eyes staring expressionless in front of him. Sir Gwydyr’s loud laugh rang out. He followed, holding the wounded gunner by the

arm. Lady Caerleon, Lord Penpergan's daughter-in-law, rose unobtrusively to make room for their host beside Madame de Tirlemont. She had noticed the direction in which his eyes had wandered.

"Gracie, dear," said Lady Celia—she had cleverly manœuvred the old lord beside the Baronne, having resolved to retain the soldier for herself—"won't you give us a little music?"

Lady Caerleon went dreamily to the piano. She was one of those tall, white-skinned, slender creatures that are so distinctly, unmistakably English—the kind of woman who instantly evokes the simile of "lily" in the minds of her admirers. She had many admirers of both sexes, for she was a mystic, soulful being, who saw nothing but the most poetic side of life, and that with a tinge of pathos. Men found her adorably womanly; women regarded her as typifying their noblest possibilities. She, too, had wanted the soldier, not—as in the case of Celia Morgan—because he was young and good to look at and pleasant, but because, her whole heart being with her husband in the trenches in Flanders, she was longing to hear more of that strange, terrible life. To speak of him at all was the only joy she knew at present; to discuss him with one who had recently seen him was rapture. Nevertheless, being rather better bred than her generation, she merely inclined her head with a little smile, went over to the Bechstein, and let her long fingers glide languorously into a piece of Debussy. It was chosen with tact. There was nothing to evoke emotion in the delicate elfin, almost human, inspiration.

Lady Celia, standing with her back to Vivianne, resting one hand on the chimneypiece, and alternately warming each silk-shod foot in its silver slipper, with a liberal display of ankle—the modern woman is nothing if not natural—let her eyes rest contentedly upon

Captain Muirhart, who stood beside her, his back to the fire, fully satisfied also with his position. As the music began the two little Belgians uttered the simultaneous exclamation of "Ah, how charming!" folded their plump, manicured hands, and assumed pious attitudes of attention. But before the twentieth bar had been reached, subdued conversation broke out from both sofas, and presently giggles and chatter.

Lady Celia's desire to keep Penarth "cheery" was certainly successful. Had it not been for the black sling in which the soldier's left arm was suspended, and for the motionless figure in the corner behind the chimney-piece, the war might very well have been non-existent. Her own attitude by the hearth, however, effectively screened Vivianne from sight. She had no remorse in leaving her thus isolated, for the snub she had received had evoked an unconscious resentment. Lady Celia, when she condescended, was accustomed to a different reception.

"No good my going on bothering the poor little creature," she thought, as she turned her back upon her. "I'm afraid she's really heart-broken, and it's dreadfully sad, but what can I do?—I wonder if she wouldn't really be happier in the convent?"

"Ah, how delicious!" cried Madame de Tirlemont, suddenly aware, in a pause of her own loquacity, that the agreeable stimulant of gentle sound had come to an end.

"That is lovely, Gracie, dear. Do go on!" cooed Lady Celia.

Lord Penpergan, who was a little deaf, was grinding out information to Madame Hollebeke.

"Don't think there's a house in the county hasn't suffered somehow. My own boy is somewhere out there, all the boy I've got. Makes one a bit jumpy. Terrible lot of only sons hit, you know."

"Ah!" The Baronne was pulling out the chou of tulle on her plump chest. Old gentlemen rather bored her, and she was not going to depress herself over English losses.

"That's my boy's wife," Lord Penpergan went on. He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the piano. His prawn-like gaze was fixed earnestly on his companion's indifferent face. It never dawned upon him that she was not absorbed in his discourse, since the punctuating ejaculations never failed. "It's hard on her, poor girl! They are extremely attached. But we are no worse off than our neighbours. Same all over England, you may say. There's her father, for instance"—the indicating thumb now turned towards Lady Celia—"old friend of mine, the Duke of Ross-shire."

"Ah!"—there was more liveliness in the interjection this time; so Lady Celia was the daughter of a duke! Once again Madame Hollebeke congratulated herself: "*Comme nous sommes bien tombées!*" She began pensively to contemplate the stately figure by the hearth. "A real aristocrat," she reflected; "one sees it at once." She wondered where her intimate rival of the recent Ostend season might have found shelter. In some quite middle-class establishment, like as not. She must really write to that poor Mathilde.

"Ha, ha, ha! Good that, isn't it? But that's what he said. I saw the letter myself. Now you know, madame, that's what I call typical. A lot of silly stuff written in the papers about recruiting—our slackness and all that, you know—calculated to give a false impression. You tell your fellows out in Belgium what I've just told you. That'll show 'em the spirit of the nation."

A moment Madame Hollebeke stared wild-eyed. But she was not one to be taken at a disadvantage.

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"Ah, repeat it to me again!" she said, bending forward with a wide smile. "I am so stupid with the English. Let me make no mistake."

Lord Penpergan chuckled. "I saw the letter myself, Duke of Ross-shire wrote to Gwydyr Morgan—her father, you know—'Here I am,' that's what he said; 'all my sons are gone, all my men are gone; here I am alone with one unsound horse.' Meant, you see, they'd taken all his horses too, what?—Isn't that it, Celia?"

Lady Celia had caught the sound of the paternal name. She now, in her turn, narrated the anecdote to Captain Muirhart. On the other side of the room, Sir Gwydyr interpolated a remark on the subject of commandeered horses. They all had to speak loudly because Lady Caerleon had begun to play again.

"People about here are wanting to know what they are to do about hunting. I say, where are the horses—eh, Penpergan? Ah, if you'd been here last winter, now, we'd have shown you a pretty bit of sport. I say, Muirhart, that reminds me—do you know what happened here last winter? A couple of German fellows came down, keen on hunting—by way of it, at least. Why, we put one of them up ourselves, didn't we, Celia? Smart chap, too; had been in the—what d'you call them?—the Crossbone Hussars. What was his name? Arnelius, that's it—Baron von Arnelius. Jove! if the chap didn't buy a lot of nags all over the place. Neighbour of ours—capital chap—got a splendid stud-farm, made a fine thing of it too, or thought he did, then, what? Well, he sold, at his own price, anyhow, don't know how many horses to those two beggars. Sharp lot they are, cut both ways, you see—more horses for them, less horses for us. By the way, Celia, there's a rumour David's back at Treowen, wounded."

Lady Celia's face clouded over, and Lord Penpergan struck in:

"Sad thing, that was; sad thing! As nice a boy as ever I'd like to see."

"You mean Johnny?" said she. Her voice was troubled.

"Your godson, wasn't he? He was always here, anyway. Gad!"—Lord Penpergan was one of the few old gentlemen left in England who still said "Gad!"—"Gad! I never cross the threshold of this house but I don't think of poor little Johnny Owen."

That memory, so tragic by reason of its very brightness, cast a shadow and a silence upon the room. The Belgian ladies, with their natural intuitiveness, fell respectfully dumb too, and assumed an air of melancholy which, perhaps, was never so distant as they would fain have made it appear.

Grace Caerleon's music thus had the room to itself. She had wandered from Debussy to one of the most delicately gay of Chopin's waltzes. It might have been appropriate enough to the ghost of Johnny, but it certainly added poignantly to the pathos of the evocation. There was a sigh that was almost a moan from behind Lady Celia, followed by the dull sound of a fall.

"Good heavens!" cried Captain Muirhart, springing forward, forgetful of his wound, as Lady Celia, startled, drew back. "The young lady's fainted."

There was a general movement. Baronne Hollebeke explained; as she slipped her arm under the young livid head, "The poor child, it is the dance music. It stirs one to the heart to hear the waltz. I myself, I could cry out the eyes of my head."

It was not so easy, after all, to banish the war from Penarth!

CHAPTER II

Shrines of Lost Loves

WHEN Peggy came back from her visits Lady Celia congratulated herself upon the success of her prescription.

"She does not look like a wilted snowdrop any more," thought the mother. "She's got her pretty colour back; and, thank goodness, she's given up dragging her feet along the ground and staring across the table at nothing!"

The girl, indeed, seemed disposed to take up her life again as if no crushing sorrow had fallen upon her. There was, perhaps, something feverish in the activity with which she flung herself into the occupations provided to her hand by the war. At any other time Lady Celia might have been exasperated by the fact that her daughter was out of the house practically from morning till night; starting off in the early morn with her own little car, which she drove herself, she spent the first days after her return between the refugees and the wounded, the village and the hospital. As it was, however, not only was Peggy apparently cheerful in her self-imposed tasks, but by reason of them she was brought into the least possible contact with Vivianne. In fact, they only met at meals, and Lady Celia rejoiced that it should be so.

Such a state of affairs could hardly continue, of course; when Peggy had been nearly a week at home the inevitable drawing together of the two girls at last came about in the most natural way in the world.

It was a hopeless afternoon of wind and rain, and even Peggy's intrepidity quailed before venturing out in the open car. She turned her energies to the amusement of the Belgian children, while Lady Celia spent a laborious hour after lunch in endeavouring to do likewise with their mammas. Self-sacrifice, however, not being that lady's strong point, she soon discovered that she had pressing correspondence to attend to. Coming upstairs to the haven of her own boudoir, she paused to listen to Peggy's laughter in the great corridor just above her. It rang out clear and sweet, and the mother paused to listen: the sound was music to her ear.

But as she reached the landing, the little Hollebeke boy, who was being chased by his cousins, tripped and fell, and instantly set up a dismal howling. Peggy and the Flemish nurse rushed to rescue and console, but, though more injured in his feelings than in his anatomy, Charlot refused to be pacified and continued to roar lustily. He was a fat, squat child, with hair in long ringlets, unattractively attired in a black velvet tunic.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Lady Celia, who found the noise and sight alike distasteful. "Can't you take them to the schoolroom, Peggy? I thought I had given orders they were to play in the schoolroom."

"The schoolroom, mother?" Peggy stood suddenly rigid; her face, flushed with running, grew white. "I won't have them in the schoolroom. I can't."

"My dear child!"—Lady Celia's fair brow became corrugated. If Peggy was going to take a dislike to the children, it would be very complicated and tiresome. What a pity they had ever asked refugees with families!

"I must have the schoolroom to myself. Mother, it isn't too much to ask."

The break in her voice, the shifting colour on her face, the shadow in her eyes were revelatory. Lady Celia understood. "She wants to sit in that room and hug all her memories of that poor boy," she thought. "Oh, dear, I had hoped she was getting over it, and it's really quite as bad as ever!" She was too shrewd, however, to press the point. Peggy must be let down easily, helped to forget, not stimulated to remember.

"Of course, dear, keep the schoolroom to yourself." Her tone expressed surprise at such a fuss about nothing. "Poor little girlie, then," she went on, extending a long white finger in the direction of the screaming child, "what's the matter with it?"

"It's a boy," said Peggy, struggling against an inclination to laugh and cry together.

"A boy, is it? Does that woman speak English? No? What a blessing!—A hideous child!"

She cast a bewitching smile at the unconscious Fleming, patted Peggy's arm, and passed nonchalantly on, in reality more disturbed than she cared to admit to herself. "I'm going to have trouble with Peggy," she thought. "I wish I'd never had the weary boy about the place. But how could one tell? It would have done so nicely—Treowen, backed by the coal mines. I couldn't have wanted anything better for her. And Johnny was a dear fellow." Lady Celia's eyes misted. "It is all this horrible war—this wicked, cruel war!" Underneath her spoilt ways, her worldly wisdom, her caprice, she had a mother's heart; and it ached for Peggy.

The schoolroom at Penarth was large and airy. It had a pleasant shabbiness—first, because Lady Celia, who was fond of putting her decisions in the form of questions, had sensibly asked: "What was the use of spending money on doing up things for the children to

make hay of?" And, secondly, because, when Peggy's two irrepressible brothers developed into Eton boys, the girl had declined to have any alteration made in the familiar surroundings. Little flowers of sentiment bloomed shyly and apart in her mind—the kind of blossom that the wind of common sense blights and the tread of materialism crushes to nothing. So Peggy guarded them very carefully; in odd corners, as it were. Now this room had become more than ever sacred to her, for it was here that Johnny and she had romped and played and fought—and kissed from childhood. It was here that she had come in the first horrible days of blind grief to cry her heart out. In the corner cupboard she had locked away every relic she could lay her hands upon. The schoolroom was the haunt of Peggy's love story. There was not a creaking wicker chair of them all but Johnny had once filled it. On the old faded sofa, with the hole in the middle where the springs had given way, he had held her embraced—oh, that little while ago!—on his last visit, while they read out of the same book and shared a packet of burnt chocolate. Childish as the memories were, they were connected with feelings rooted in Peggy's very being.

Her young sorrow seemed to break over her afresh like a wave as she ran along the passage to her sanctum. She thought longingly of casting herself on the old sofa, burying her face in the big green pillows and yielding herself to the relief of tears. It is the little things that are the hardest to endure when the heart is aching; she would have been capable of going to her lover's funeral dry-eyed.

She opened the door, then stood rooted on the threshold, staring.

There was someone already on the old sofa—someone weeping, cast face downwards, just as she had meant to fling herself. She caught the sound of a low

moan, but as she entered it was hushed. The figure lay quite still. She knew those long, copper-red plaits and the shabby black garments—it was the strange girl, Vivianne de Flesselles, with whom she had made hitherto such very perfunctory acquaintance. Vivianne was not an easy person to make friends with, and Peggy was sensitive to rebuff. Her first sensation now was one of overwhelming indignation. It was evident the schoolroom had been already handed over to these visitors—and how like her mother not to say so! That was a way of dealing she hated: seeming to give in and all the while not meaning it. But the next minute the rigid misery expressed by that prone figure, the echo of the moan in her ears, stirred Peggy to profound pity. She felt instinctively that here was a harder, more-cruel grief than her own.

She closed the door and came slowly up to the sofa.
"Mademoiselle!"

Vivianne shuddered and sat up. Peggy was frightened at the deathlike pallor of the face.

"Can I do anything for you?" she murmured, awestruck. Why, the girl could hardly be older than herself! Those long hanging plaits spoke still of schoolroom days—but Peggy felt her infinitely removed—aged by experiences which kill youth. The eyes that were slowly turned upon her were tearless. She had not the clue to the mystery that filled them, but she guessed it sinister.

"I want nothing, thanks," said Vivianne, after a pause. She spoke perfect and fluent English, yet to speak at all seemed an effort; her voice sounded so horribly tired, Peggy thought that she could hardly bear to listen to it. Like the expression in the shadowed eyes, it was piteously out of keeping with the exile's years.

Though she had hardly ever known what it was to

be timid, Peggy found herself helpless and benumbed before this self-concentrated, dreadful sorrow. She had been told how Vivianne's mother and sister had been reported dead—slain by the Germans; and though she recognised to the full the agony of this loss she felt her own grief to be even more intimately tragic. Surely two hearts so cruelly stricken ought to be in sympathy with each other, yet she could not find a single phrase to clothe the pity and the understanding that was in hers. Vivianne's hand looked bloodless, like ivory; it lay cold in her clasp, and presently was drawn slowly from the friendly pressure. Peggy felt desperately that she must break down the barrier. It was intolerable to her to see this misery and not be able to get at it somehow. The thought that had just passed through her mind leaped into words:

"Why do you turn from me? I, too, have lost what I loved. I have lost more than you!"

The other flung her a darkling glance.

"How have you lost more than I?"

"Oh, I know," cried Peggy, "what terrible, terrible sorrow yours is—I ought not to say it is less than mine; your lost ones were your nearest and dearest."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Oh, dear Vivianne, of your poor, poor mother and sister."

The girl drew back to the farthest corner of the sofa. Her pale face grew so much paler yet that Peggy was afraid she might faint again; she had heard what had happened the other night.

"Oh, what is it—what can I do? Vivianne!"

"You understand nothing, you know nothing. You don't know what I think or what I feel." She put both her hands to her heart, pressing them as if to still an intolerable pain. "All that anyone can do, to be kind, is to leave me alone."

To leave her alone—that was just what seemed inhuman, impossible!

"Indeed, I can understand. Better than anyone, I think." It cost Peggy a great effort to go on speaking of her own trouble. She had the reticence of all really profound natures; the horror of a touch upon her wound. Nevertheless, her sorrow called out impetuously to the other sorrow. "My heart is broken too; I have lost all I care for."

A kindling of interest came into the brooding eyes.

"I am sorry," said Vivianne.

Peggy bit her lips. Tears had been gathering ever since her return. She had come in here to shed them in peace; now, at her own words, her heart rose. She struggled fiercely for self-control. The air of life had deepened in Vivianne's expression; even her voice had lost its dull note; it had gathered a music in its deep tones which quite finished little Peggy, who covered her face and wept with rending sobs.

For a while the exile sat motionless and let her companion's grief storm. But presently she spoke again.

"He is dead, then?"

Peggy nodded and sought blindly for her handkerchief. It was only when the Belgian exclaimed harshly: "*Ah, que vous êtes heureuse!*" that the torrent was arrested.

Startled, Peggy turned her quivering face.

"It is you who have not understood. I hate talking of it, but to you I feel I must.—He was just everything to me. We were going to be married when we were old enough. We always cared for each other. And now——" She broke off. The fact went with her night and day, and yet it was agony to set it down in speech.

"He is dead," said Vivianne again. "I knew at once it was that.—I say again, you are happy."

Peggy drew away. It was both cruel and mad to say such things.

"I say you are happy," insisted Vivianne.

When Lady Celia had declared she was like a marble statue, Madame Hollebeke had answered that fire would be found under the marble. Vivianne was, indeed, now as a creature of fire. The very whiteness of her skin became ardent; her eyes shot wild light; her voice quivered like a flame as the words sprang in broken, leaping phrases.

"I said you are happy; I repeat it. You have still your own—your lover, he is still your own—you have not lost him; he will always be your own. He died while he loved you. Oh, what happiness! Love always yours, love that you can cherish. But I—I——"

Again her vividly moving hands were clasped and pressed against her heart. "It is I who have lost everything. My mother, my sister—oh, I do not know; I know nothing, but it is terror. It is like—— When I went through our village I saw—I will not tell you what I saw, you are too little. But it is not the worst. Below the steps of the church there was a heap of something. It was covered with sheets, and there was blood on the sheets. That was worse than anything I saw—that heap, because it was covered. That is what I feel all the time about my mother and sister. It is like that—a heap covered with a sheet, with blood on the sheet. No one will ever lift that sheet for me. I don't want it lifted. I shall never look under it. And yet that is not the worst! I could have borne it, since they are dead. But I am alive, and I go on living, and—oh, there was one, too, for me, and he is living, and I wish he were dead or that I was. That he should be living and I—and we as we are! Oh, my God, I gave my heart, like you! I loved him; it was always understood we were there each for the other. I, too, have lost—lost!"

"Oh, poor Vivianne!"

"No, don't touch me! He——"

She broke off in her turn. She could not put the uttermost of her sorrow into words. She lifted her clasped hands to her throat as if she were strangling.

"He is a prisoner—wounded, maimed perhaps!" Peggy's tender spirit was groping for the point of anguish.

"Ah!" cried the other with a cry that was almost a scream, "wounded, maimed, I would have adored him. It would have been joy—a joy as beautiful as my first dream—to have devoted my life to him. No, no. He was not fighting. He never thought of fighting. It is not that. You have only to read what I give you, and you will ask no more. Read, I say." Passion suddenly fell from her. The grey ash of desolation seemed to settle again over the fire. She snatched an envelope from out of the folds of her blouse and flung it on Peggy's lap. "Read the telegram first, the letter afterwards. All is there."

Peggy had been as much taken aback by this explosion of rage and grief as she had been chilled by the former mood. She could find nothing to say. Half reluctantly, half curiously, she spread open on her knee the blue sheet and read its printed line of tape. The message ran thus, in French:

"Regret infinitely impossible come desolated
atrocious news affectionate sympathy

"LADISLAS."

Peggy lifted her fringed eyelids to gaze blankly at her companion.

"Read the letter," said Vivianne between her teeth. "I do not know why I am showing you these things; you're only a child and I'm old—old! But you have a sorrow, a real sorrow. I must speak—it's killing me."

She wrung her hands and, thrusting them between her knees, sat staring before her. Peggy drew the letter out of its envelope. Perhaps she would understand now.

It was also in French, written on thick, creamy paper, stamped with a gold coronet and the address—"Palazzo Goldoni, Venice."

"MY VERY DEAR LITTLE COUSIN,—I supplement my telegram by a few words, though they are indeed difficult to write. What can one say? It is too horrible. My dear, good aunt and sweet, beautiful Natacha! No, I refuse to believe it. There are things which are impossible. I feel sure, by the time you receive this, you will have heard different tidings. At the worst they can only be in prison. How thankful I am, at least, that you have escaped and are in such excellent, safe care.

"I remember Madame Hollebeke very well from my last visit to you. She gave me the impression of a charming person. Pray present her my homage. I wish, indeed, that I could come to you as you request. Beside the difficulty which the journey presents at present, I am unfortunately in the complete impossibility, as I wired to you, of leaving Venice now. My dear little cousin, I am in the middle of my opera. You know I must place art—art—above everything else. Do not forget to keep me informed of events. I shall be anxious if I do not hear.

"Always believe in the old affection of your devoted cousin—LASLO."

Peggy read, pausing once or twice to con a phrase over again. Then she folded the letter and put it, with the telegram, back in the envelope. Her cheeks were scarlet; indignation quivered in her voice.

"You asked him to come to you, to your help—the

man you were engaged to—and he answers you like this ! ”

Vivianne snatched the paper from her hand with a laugh that sounded, Peggy thought, much worse than her angry cry, her sad moan.

“I wrote to him, yes: letter upon letter. I don’t know how many. What was it you said to me of your dead friend just now? He was everything to you, you were going to be married when you were old enough, you had always loved each other? That was your story—that was mine. At least I thought so till—till I got these. Do you wonder now that I told you you were happy?”

“Oh, what can I say?” exclaimed Peggy. “It is dreadful.” She felt words so inadequate that she began to stammer. “You did not know; you believed in him.”

“As I believed in God.”

Vivianne’s strange, deep voice had lost its ring of music. It sounded, the listener thought, harsh as the voice of despair itself.

“Now it’s all gone. I can’t believe in God any more. How can I? After what I have seen, what is hidden, what I know, how *can* I believe? There is no mercy, there is no truth. No mercy anywhere, no truth or pity in any man. There can be no God ! ”

“Oh—don’t say such things.” Peggy flung her arms round the tense figure. “I said them too, once. I was wrong. God is there; there behind it all. Have faith—it’s the only thing that helps. I got back my love when I got back to God.”

The other did not stir. She spoke, scarcely moving her lips, in the same unnatural voice:

“*Pour moi, il n’y a plus que l’enfer.*”

CHAPTER III

The House Desolate

DAVID sat in the oak parlour, in the old chair which had been placed on the window dais. He would sit here most days, looking out across the familiar landscape with dreamy eyes. It was brisk, clear, frosty weather; the brief sunshine of the November mid-day lay on every tint of gold and russet where the valley spread, from the deep note of the bracken to the pale flame of the larch. The far hills were cut like jewels against the sky, Pen-y-fal emerging like some dream freak, a golden spear-head out of the placid curving lines of the horizon. In the middle distance stretched the beech woods, softly purple.

Never, thought the master of Treowen, had his home looked more beautiful.

He had dreaded the return indescribably, but now that he was here it was a kind of peace he found, after all. With the breaking of his superb physical strength the passionate intensity of his feelings had for the time subsided. After the days of carnage, the ceaseless clangour, the accumulated excitement, the horrors that had buffeted his senses, every sense was in its turn to find balm at Treowen. To have the fresh, clean air in his nostrils, fragrant from the woods, exquisitely pure in the first frosts—he that without respite had breathed the stench of fire and death!—to gaze out, as he was doing now, on a land unscarred, on prosperity instead of destruction, on nature cherished

instead of outraged; to let the silence wrap him round, bathing ears tortured by the scream of the shells, by the thunder of guns, the rattle of musketry, the shouts, the groans, and lull nerves which had been racked by the concussions in the rent air—what a healing!

He still heard these alarms in his sleep, and would wake vibrating. And then it was almost unbelievable to find the wonderful stillness about him, the great enveloping peace that stretched and spread for miles into the night; to know that his own land lay without, his woods and his fields and the country beyond serene in the darkness—inviolate.

Those three weeks between the hour when he had leaped upon the quay at Havre and that other hour when he had been swung, semi-conscious, into the hospital ship, seemed as if cut out of his real life. He looked back as upon a stranger upon the being who had fought and charged and pursued, who had crouched in the trenches through days that seemed endless, and crawled night long, inch by inch, to spring and slay at dawn; who had held the strength and lives of his men by sheer force of will against overwhelming odds; who had become a byword for ferocity even to his own side. Yonder had been a fighter, reckless, daring, exulting in slaughter, sullen and apart from his comrades. He had had nothing in common with David the shepherd, the man of peace, whose thoughts had been all of the kindly things of life: the increase of his flocks, the nurture of his soil, the well-being of his dependents; who had sought for his strayed lambs and carried them back to the fold; who had had no dearer project than to work and give up all for his brother.

The David he had now found was yet another man. Wrath, lust of vengeance had fallen from his spirit as a cloak that is cast. It had been a phase of anguish; even the gentlest creature will strike out when its

brood is hurt. Now there had come upon him a quietude which was altogether new to him. He had never before known a quiet heart since the full responsibility of life had been laid on his shoulders. Always he had had an anxiety. So much had depended upon him; if he had failed it would have meant suffering for another existence dearer than his own. The more strenuously he had accumulated work, the more apprehension had gathered. He had striven and fretted, even in prosperity. Now there was nothing to fret about, no one to strive for any more. Let the winds blow and the rain stream, Johnny would be neither cold nor wet, neither richer nor poorer. There was no more to lose; the end of grief was reached.

"I shall sleep to-night," says the old mother who has lost her last son, in "Riders to the Sea." "I can rest at last," was what the wounded man felt as he sat, hour after hour, gazing out on the lands of Treowen, yonder away where he had toiled so hard, where he would toil never again.

It is a singular freedom that the strong spirit finds when the supreme sacrifice has been accomplished. But it is a freedom akin to that of death. To desire no more, to fear no more—the human being who reaches this point is either a saint of God or one of His most stricken creatures.

* * * * *

Peggy, vowing that she would not be a moment, left Vivianne to wait in the car, slipped round by the old tower, through the back courtyard, into the kitchen. Old Nanny, standing by the table, tossing dough, clapped her befloured hands together.

"*Calon fach!* And, indeed, is it you? And, indeed, I was thinking it is coming our way you'd be. There's lonely he is, the master."

Peggy's face was set, the pretty colour had gone from her cheeks. This return to Treowen was hard, and she felt that she could bear Nanny least of all. She came over to the old woman and kissed her hurriedly, standing behind her not to see the pitiful quiver of the withered face.

As Nanny had called out in surprise, rosy Madlen came hurrying in from the scullery. To Peggy's intense astonishment she was accompanied by a fat, smiling child of some three years who—white cap, round, red cheeks, long blue skirts, tight little bodice and all—might have rolled out of a canvas of Gerard Dow.

"Why, Nanny, where on earth did that Dutch dumpling come from?"

"Dear Lord, Miss Peggy *bach*, there's glad I am! *Ach y fi*, Treowen has been the sad and lonely house since last you were in it. But what's the good of talking, whatever? Talk will never bring the dead to life. And, indeed, Miss Peggy, it's looking for you I have been, and the master home a week! Indeed, yes, yes. And it's the little girl you'll be wondering at? Poor lamb, it gives me the pain in my heart whiles to see her laugh the way she does; and her the poor lost babe, whatever; worse than motherless, you may say."

Peggy, with a strange, fixed smile and sad eyes, stood regarding the child, who chuckled humorously as she toddled forward, one fat hand grasping Madlen's apron, the other brandishing a piece of bread and jam.

"It's a little Belgian, I suppose? Poor atom! Has it got nobody? And how did it come here?"

"And, indeed, Miss Peggy, it would scald your tender heart to hear the story. Didn't they that are looking after yonder unhappy refugee creatures put her

and the poor woman, her mother, down at Bwlchlin with Mrs. Jones, whatever. And didn't the woman go crazy out and out and have to be taken to the asylum? *Ach y fi!* And happening to be passing the day, I offered to take the little child in here. Mrs. Jones, she had to go with the woman to—to the place where they were taking her—for, to be sure, it's the kind heart she has. The poor crazy thing was scared of everyone and she would not let one of them move her or touch her but Mrs. Jones herself, having known her before the fit came on. And so, indeed, it was I took the child then for a day or two, so to speak."

Here the small person in question gave a hilarious shout, executed a shuffle with great energy on the kitchen flags, and waved her jam trophy. Peggy laughed, with a lump in her throat.

"What's going to become of her?" she asked.

"Now, there's a tale for you! The master is set on keeping her. Indeed, yes, yes; that is, without the poor creature in the asylum come to herself again, which, the Lord knows, may never be. The master takes great notice of her."

Peggy put out her hand and gently touched the top of the white-capped head; then she turned away.

"I suppose I may go up to him, Nanny? You mustn't leave the bread, I know. I'll find my way."

"He is sitting by the window, Miss Peggy, as usual. Doctor Evans has just been, whatever. *Ach y fi*, there's bad it is, that good right arm of the master's. And Doctor Evans was saying, as he went out, Miss Peggy, that it's never like he'll be able to use it again. Well, well, indeed the Lord gives and takes. There's bad, sure; but there's good also, for he'll not be let go fight again, the master."

"I am going to him this minute," said the girl.

She ran quickly through the echoing hall and up

the great stairs, lest the lurking memories should close about her and overwhelm her. At the door of the oak parlour she paused, drew a long breath and entered. She advanced so softly that it was not till she was quite close to him that David became aware of her presence.

They looked at each other in a long silence which neither seemed able to break. She was shocked at the alteration she found in him. The David she remembered was a bronzed, hardy, active man, with an air of challenging strength and determination, one who seemed to have nothing in common with the languid invalid who now lay back in the arm-chair, who turned upon her this pale, wasted face and those vaguely apprehending eyes, with their depth of settled sadness. She would have had it in her to cry out like a child: "Oh, David, this can't be you!"

At last a faint smile came to his lips and a gentle light to his gaze.

"Peggy!" he said, and tried to rise, supporting himself on his left hand.

"Oh, don't move," she implored; and, as he fell back not unwillingly, she advanced awkwardly and put her hand into his unwounded one. Her gaze was fixed on the bandaged arm tied to his breast.

"Does it hurt?" she asked.

"Nothing to speak of."

She sat down on the window-seat. Between them lay the consciousness of that other hurt for which there was no remedy. Both swerved from the thought of touching upon it.

"I only found out you were back here this morning. Father said he had been to see you, and told me how you were hit, and everything. Mother was angry; she didn't want me to know; she kept it from me on purpose."

David had no need to ask why. He looked wistfully at Johnny's little sweetheart. On his side he found a change in her: it grew more distinct every moment. It was as if some radiance had been extinguished, some spring of youth broken. She had fallen into a listless posture; her gaze wandered and came back to him; then she smiled at him—and it was that smile, more than anything else, that marked the immense distance her soul had traversed.

"I do not think Peggy will forget, in spite of her mother," he thought. And though he did not wish her bright years clouded, he could not help being glad. As if she had read what was in his mind, she said slowly:

"Mother may do what she likes; it's no use, nothing will change me."

"Peggy dear, you're too young to say that."

She jerked her head with her old defiance. "That's got nothing to do with it; but I keep my counsel." Then she smiled again, beautifully and tenderly, so that she seemed to him a child no more.

"Johnny's brother," she said, "you and I know."

There was once again a silence. Secretly their spirits communed.

"I'm not unhappy," she said after a while. "Are you? At least," she corrected herself, "now that I have seen real unhappiness, I know that I am not. I shall go wanting all my life; but I'd rather have that, rather miss Johnny as I do, carry this sorrow of him—oh, it is sacred and precious—than have been without it."

David pondered over her words. He had once thought Johnny and Peggy such futile, frivolous beings, creatures as pretty and as irresponsible as a pair of twittering birds. Since then he had learned what a gallant and delicate spirit Johnny had concealed under

his fantastic attitude; now in the petulant girl he was finding a deep womanhood.

"You see," repeated she, "I can't feel as if I'd lost him altogether. It would have been so much worse, oh, so unbearable, if he had not been what he was—if he had been——" She broke off, flushing. His eyes questioned her. She sprang up. "It's dreadful! I had only meant to come in for a minute. She's out there in the car."

"Who?"

"David, such a poor girl! A Belgian, a refugee, a lady. The Germans burnt her castle and everything, and she escaped. Oh, David, her mother and sister! They are dead, but nobody knows how——"

The man's face became so stern that she stopped once more and cast a frightened look at him. "Oh, you know about it! Father told you, I'm sure. Oh, David, what did really happen?"

He hesitated. His glance changed, grew extraordinarily, paternally tender as he contemplated her.

"I know nothing at all," he answered at last. "Your father mentioned just what you have said yourself. Did you say the poor child was outside, waiting?"

"May I bring her in?" cried Peggy eagerly. "I think it might do her good. I really brought her on purpose. I don't know what to do with her." Tears welled into her eyes. "She's—she's dreadful!"

David frowned as if his wounds stabbed him, but he only said, with his formal politeness:

"If you don't mind going down for her, Peggy. You must excuse a cripple, my dear."

Peggy set off running on her errand, clapping the heavy door behind her. The man had a melancholy smile. . . . Youth was alive there still, after all. The time would come, he said to himself—he forced himself to

think he hoped—when the memory of Johnny would cease to be anything more than a sweetness in the background, not the centre of her existence.

Vivianne advanced slowly into the oak parlour after Peggy. This time David struggled to his feet. She lifted her dark gaze upon him; it was full of anger, misery and terror, the gaze of a creature tortured; and his heart was wrung.

A little while ago it had seemed to him as if no sharpness of pain could ever reach him again. Now, all at once, he knew that, even like Peggy's youth, his manhood was still strongly alive within him. The pulse of battle throbbed in him again. Such a young, frail girl—and to wear such a look! He had mourned over Peggy's blossom hopes laid low. Yet the death that had overtaken her beloved was the immemorially beautiful—*dulce et decorum!* And while she mourned she must glory. But here! . . .

The blood rushed to his forehead. He took up the slender, ungloved hand that hung listlessly by her side.

"You are very cold: come to the hearth."

These were the first words that David Owen spoke to Vivianne de Flesselles, and they were typical of the form his thoughts were to take concerning her. To warm that child, perishing and forlorn in the bitter blast; to gather that lamb from the storm into the fold; to shelter, to protect, to cherish.

Could he but have reached to those who had stamped on this exquisite piece of youth such a brand of misery, he had it in him to have strangled with his single arm. Overwhelming was the passion that rose within him. Peggy saw him grow livid after the flush, and thought he was suffering. But he put her gently aside when she would have forced him back among his cushions.

"No, Peggy, your friend is cold—I want to bring her to the hearth."

"At least," cried Peggy, very severe and nurse-like all at once, "you certainly shan't drag that heavy chair. The idea! Unless you sit down at once we shall both go away."

David, unmindful, retained Vivianne's hand, and slowly—for his weakness was still pronounced—began to lead her towards the fire. But midway she stopped, looked at him with offence in those piteous eyes, and drew her fingers from him.

His compassion deepened. The frightened things of field and wood are wont to struggle thus against the hand that would help them.

They sat in the circle of the glow shed by the huge old logs. Nearly all the year round, the hearth was kept enkindled in the oak parlour. The room had the feeling of it; of a warmth and life that seemed part of the old house itself. Vivianne had not uttered a single word. She took the chair Peggy had pushed up for her, and crouching forward, spread her hands to the flame. Two or three times she cast long looks at the wounded man who sat at the corner of the huge chimney, shifting himself unconsciously from time to time as if in pain. The nervous resentment with which she had repelled his touch had died out of her air; she seemed to be reflecting upon him with a profound interest. Peggy, who had started a brave chatter, suddenly fell silent; there came one of those pauses which even the most garrulous cannot find words to fill. Vivianne broke it at last with a question:

"Your arm—it is hurting you?"

David started slightly. It was what Peggy had wanted to know a little while ago; but there was none

of the soft pity with which his little friend had spoken in the stranger's accents.

"I was not thinking of it," he said.

Vivianne was still fixing him. The intentness of her gaze seemed to give a special meaning to her rare speech.

"How are you hurt?"

With the disinclination of the Englishman to speak of himself, he told her briefly that he had got a bit knocked about with shrapnel—two or three bullets in his arm, perhaps four. Peggy gave a cry; but there was no softening in the Belgian girl's gaze.

"You must have been annoyed. Your right arm! You won't be able to kill any more now."

"That's what I thought at first," said David, and stopped.

"Don't you think it now?"

"Now more than ever." The passion within him broke out fiercely.

Peggy, glancing, a little breathless, from one to the other, saw to her amazement how the brooding fire of Vivianne's gaze flamed into open vindictiveness as she went on:

"You men, you like to shed blood. It amuses you. It is all your sport, after all, to kill. In war you have human beings instead of beasts: it must be more exciting, and there is more blood."

"How can you?"—cried Peggy, furious. "How dare you say such a thing?" It was Johnny she was thinking of, not David—Johnny, who had given his young life. "How dare you talk as if Germans and English were the same?"

Vivianne dropped her gaze; her voice became veiled too. "You know nothing," said she. "You are a child. German, English, Pole, there is no difference between man and man."

Peggy turned scarlet. She opened her mouth to protest, but Vivianne went slowly on :

"Men like to torture. If they don't torture bodies they torture souls and hearts."

Peggy closed her mouth. She remembered. Oh, poor Vivianne! Had she not already made her feel there was happiness even in Johnny's death? She looked across at David, who was shading his eyes with his hand. At last he said very gently :

"It is true I was glad to shed blood in war—that blood. To look back upon it, now, it seems impossible. Yet a minute ago I would have been glad to do it again, because—because of what I see in your face."

Peggy gave a little jump. It seemed so unlike David to speak in this way, and to a stranger.

Vivianne turned her head away with a haughty movement; then she said, in accents which sounded as if the words were dragged from her against her will :

"I feel as if all that blood were black in my very soul!" And, after a pause, added deliberately : "But that is not why I look as you say."

"She is very unhappy," said Peggy, and got up, trembling. "I think we'd better go. I'll come again soon, David."

"When you come," said David, rising also, "bring her with you."

"Why do you want me? I cast a shadow everywhere. Even she"—Vivianne pointed to Peggy with a faintly scornful gesture—"she is already afraid of me!"

While Peggy protested, David stood battling with the inarticulateness which would not let him express any of the thoughts that were pressing to his lips : "I want you to come because you are hurt. I never liked

killing nor the sight of blood until—until the wild beasts came and took my ewe lamb—those wild beasts that have broken your young life too. I would bring you here, as I have brought the lambs in out of the storm—the lambs whose dams were dead in the snow.” Out loud he merely said at last:

“I hope you will come. I’m not afraid of the shadow.” Then he sighed involuntarily. Did not shadow lie heavy on Treowen as it was?

“I’ll come,” said Vivianne. She seemed to be answering some inner voice rather than speaking to her companions.

“Of course she’ll come,” cried Peggy eagerly. “Vivianne, we must go. Good-bye, David, dear David!” She kissed his shoulder where the bandage crossed it, with one of those swift impulses that made her seem still a child, and ran out of the room, leaving Vivianne standing uncertainly before her host. He made no attempt to put out his hand this time to her, but bowed, flushing.

She took a step towards the door, stopped and turned back, with a spontaneous gesture flinging out her hand to his. She remained motionless a moment then, looking at him as if she would read into his soul. Then the corners of her mouth quivered and drooped, her eyes filled with tears. Snatching her fingers from his touch, she went quickly away.

Peggy had raced through the house with the same speed with which she had entered it. She now called Vivianne from the door of the long stone passage that led to the kitchens from the hall.

“Come this way,” she cried. “I want you to look at your little compatriot.”

Vivianne obeyed slowly. She followed Peggy as she flitted ahead, and came out after her into the courtyard. There was a group in the sunshine—old Nanny

and rosy-cheeked Madlen, with her rough, red arms and spotless apron, and an odd, minute little figure in a dark blue cotton garment reaching down to the ground, and a close white cap tied tightly round a jovial baby face.

It was prancing about in little wooden shoes, apparently regarding its own gambols as a huge joke. The three who stood looking on were smiling. Vivianne surveyed the small creature gravely.

"Where does it come from?"

Peggy's face clouded. "Oh, it's sad. The poor mother was taken to the madhouse a few days ago. It has nobody. Nanny and Betty here are going to keep it, they say."

"Indeed, yes, yes," said the old woman, curtsying distantly to the strange lady. "The master would never let her go now, whatever."

"And she's not a bit of trouble," cried Madlen, plunging for the child and covering it with kisses.

"Isn't it the Dutchiest thing you ever saw?" exclaimed Peggy, laughing again; "only it's Flemish, or, rather, Walloon, I think, for it understands my French a little. And her name is Bullet, Nanny says—Boulotte, because she is so fat, I suppose. Nobody knows anything more about her. Good-bye, Boulotte!" She kissed the plump red cheek, then Nanny's withered one, and nodded to Madlen. "Good-bye. We must go."

The car had been left outside the old tower gate, and both girls moved towards it. After her first glance at the waif Vivianne had not looked again.

"And, indeed," said old Nanny, gazing after her with no approving expression, "I'm loath to see Miss Peggy take up with that young foreign lady. There's proud for you!"

Madlen began afresh to cuddle the small, unconscious refugee with extra energy. That anyone could have passed by the orphan without a sign of love was what she could not understand.

"There's a bad heart for you!" was her summing up.

CHAPTER IV

A Flash and a Dream

THE two were silent for a while, as the car whirled down the long descent through the park to the main road. Peggy's heart was heavy. While she had laughed and fondled the child there had been a secret wailing in her soul. The poor, queer babe. . . . It was probably the only child Treowen would ever know now!

Graves upon graves, she thought forlornly, as she stared out across the falling valley. It was growing grey and colourless, for clouds had swept up across the radiant sky with the swift turn of the November day. How much had been buried with Johnny yonder in that unknown French woodland—all her hopes, all poor David's hopes, all Treowen's hopes!

What would happen to Treowen? She clenched her hands under the stress of the thought. There had been so much to grieve for that this aspect of their loss had not struck her before. How dreadful it must be for David, who had so loved his place, worked so hard and long, who had saved it at such cost, to know himself the last Owen of Treowen!

Then swift upon this realisation came the question : *Why should it be so?*

They had wheeled out under the archway of the lodge and were spinning down the broad road that ran through the valley over the bridge. Peggy bent forward. She knew the exact moment when from the

other side of the river she would catch a view of the old manor, crowning the hill in beauty.

With what a throb of pride, of love and happiness, she had been wont to watch for this view of her future dwelling. The day they had ridden over together to tell David of their engagement—oh, it was only such a little while ago! Johnny had said to her: "Your home, my Peg! You are just made for it. It's like an empty frame without you now."

It was only when they were quite alone, and rarely then, that Johnny said these dear things. As she now looked up at the stately pile, which a last flash of sunshine was gilding against the darkness of the gathering clouds, she thought of her boy-lover, but she thought of David more.

Happy youth is of its essence egotistic. Johnny and she had taken it for granted—joyfully, like Nature's children, provided for—that David should give his all to them. It had never so much as dawned upon them that the elder brother might want a future for himself; have aspirations of his own. Johnny had only been ten when he had been appointed heir to Treowen; he had grown up to regard the position as though it had been his by right of birth. Peggy stared at the conclusion which suddenly presented itself, marvelling that she should have been so long blind to the facts. There was no reason on earth why Treowen's hopes should be buried with her own, why Treowen should not have a mistress—other than herself; why there should not one day be children there, children of David's to carry on the name.

She would not acknowledge, even in her secret thought, that the mere imaginary possibility made her feel as if the grip of sorrow on her heart had tightened; that there might be a kind of melancholy solace in the irredeemable nature of the tragedy which was so in-

timately her own. But it was, perhaps, the stimulus which sacrifice always brings to the finer thinking natures which led her to form with ardour a new and sudden resolve—David must marry.

She fell back in the car, and closing her eyes, began to hunt through her memory for a suitable mistress of Treowen. It was very disconcerting that she could find no one to satisfy her. Vivianne broke into her reflections with an abrupt question :

"That gentleman, your friend—does he live there always alone?"

"Poor David? Yes, he's quite alone now."

"He has no longer anyone, then?"

"No one." Peggy was on the point of adding impulsively a word of her own just-formed desires, when the other went on :

"It is all the better for him. He will have no one more to lose."

There was silence for a while then between them. Peggy always found it difficult to meet the bitterness in which her companion's sorrow expressed itself. At last she said tentatively :

"What did you think of him?"

"Of him? Of whom?"

"Mr. Owen, of course. Are we not talking of him?"

"He seems good," said Vivianne slowly, as if the words were dragged from her. Peggy flushed.

"Good! There never was anyone like him. Good, oh, so good and kind!"

She would have said more, but her companion's gaze, full upon her, paralysed her. Those eyes of Vivianne's made her feel miserable. They held not only such revolt against fate, but such passion of reproach in their depths, that even she, whose sole desire was to help, seemed to herself to come under their ban.

"Perhaps one day you will console him," said the Belgian girl.

Peggy turned on her with all her old vehemence and all the dignity of her new sorrow. It was she who now reproached.

"How you dare!—you, who know how I stand. Oh, what a horrible mind you must have! You cannot have understood anything I have told you. You can't have ever known real love, true love."

Vivianne's eyes grew dark in her white face.

"You are right," she said. "You do well to remind me. The love I knew was not true."

"Oh," cried the other, generously remorseful, "I did not mean that."

Vivianne went on, unheeding.

"You are right, I have a horrible mind. It is poisoned. In me there is nothing but bitterness—bitterness. I see you try to be kind. You look at me with sweet eyes, you want to help me. Even that, even your sweetness, is twisted into gall before it reaches me. You do me charity, just as you do charity to the Flemish brat that laughed up at you just now—that laughed because it cannot understand yet how bitter charity is. Those two, my own countrywomen, they hate me. I bore them with my misery. They kept me with them only because they would have been shamed had they not shown me—charity. The clothes on my back are what they gave me out of charity. Now the bread I eat is your mother's dole. She has taken me in, lodges me, feeds me because it is agreed that it is the right thing for English people to do. It is the fashion to be kind to the poor refugees! She hates me in her heart; she wishes I had never come. I darken her house. It is bad for you, she thinks, to have for a companion anyone so black, so despairing. She would like to be rid of

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me: so would they all, my countrywomen, everyone."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Peggy, "I wouldn't. Oh, if you knew!" She cast her warm young arms round the tense figure, "I would give anything, anything to help you, to comfort you. It isn't charity. Won't you believe me? It is because——"

The other repulsed the embrace.

"You are not going to say that it is because you find anything to love in me. You cannot. You are just a little more sorry than the rest. You are still a child—have kept a child's good heart."

"No, no," repeated Peggy. "It is because I, too, have lost everything." Once more meeting Vivianne's eyes, she fell silent.

"You cannot go on," said the girl. "How could you? Think of yourself and of me. I am an outcast, penniless. My own are dead. How dead? I told you I can never ask how. My home is in ashes. The man I loved, whom I always loved, whom I believed loved me——" Her voice had maintained its firmness until she came to these words; then it failed and fell like a bird hit in mid-flight. She tried to lift it again: "*Il ne veut plus de moi,*" she said in a kind of whisper. "He left me there. He did not care what happened. I am nothing to him but a poor rag of humanity, not worth the picking up. Sorrow and poverty, all that's very ugly. It is quite natural, after all. He liked me rich and proud and surrounded and gay. They called us the little princesses, because our mother was a princess. Because, too, we were so spoilt. It is quite natural," she repeated. The whisper had grown into a harsh laughing tone which was worse to hear than anything. "*Il a bien compris.* This creature that I have become, what would he do with it? He has very well understood. Ah, my letters made it all quite

plain. It is I who have been a fool. Oh, God, what a fool ! ”

“He’s base, he’s unworthy of the name of man ! ” burst forth the other girl. “You are well rid of such a wretch ! ”

Vivianne allowed herself to be embraced this time ; but the despair on her young face deepened. She said at last, gently enough, staring straight in front of her :

“And when I have succeeded, when I have torn that image out of my soul, that image I have cherished, it will indeed be then, more than ever, that I have nothing.”

Peggy was wrung by impotent compassion. Suddenly, out of the darkness itself a possibility flashed upon her. She put it from her as a suggestion of madness ; but against all reason, common sense, even against practicality and desirableness, it would not be laid.

* * * * *

David had a troubled dream that night. It began with the vague hunting for something through mists and shifting shadows, which is a familiar enough form of unrest to one who is suffering. Presently the sorrow of working hours began to weave itself into sleeping fantasies. It was Johnny he was looking for, Johnny whom he knew to be somewhere out on a great plain under a dark sky, wanting help. And after what seemed in his dream æons of effort, endless search through interminable wastes, he found him, lying on the ground. It was so dark he could not see his face.—Then he dreamed on : he was kneeling, trying to lift his brother up to his breast. The boy lay heavy, he could not move him at first ; and at last when he did lift him the pressure of his weight was intolerable. He thought : “It is because Johnny is dead ” ; and anguish, the illimitable anguish which is even worse in dreams than

it is in reality, swept over his soul. It was as if he himself was sinking into the pit of death. Suddenly everything changed—he had come out of the darkness and the horror. He was in the oak wood and it was spring; there was a rosy, lovely light of sunset, and a thrush was singing. The weight was still in his arms, and it was still Johnny—Johnny the little fair boy, smiling up at him, warm and living. His heart gave a great leap; relief ran through him like wine, chasing away agony.

"It was all a dream," he was saying; "it was always all a dream!" His arm was hurting him where the weight of Johnny lay: he wondered why the child should press so hard. Then he saw that it was not the child he was holding. He was looking down on the face of a girl who was vaguely associated, as Johnny had been, with something terrible. Her face was very pale but it was radiant. . . . There was a smile upon her lips. Her eyes were fixed on his, and they were trustful. Then joy and pain together swept over him in an ecstasy that was sharper than anything he had known.

He started awake, the room was full of ruddy light, the logs on the hearth had fallen apart and flamed; and his wounded arm was throbbing cruelly.

He felt disturbed to the very core of his being. Even if the pain had not been so acute, to sleep again would have been impossible. The impression that he had held the stranger whom Peggy had brought to his house that day—held her in his arms—was extraordinarily vivid. In spite of reason he could scarcely persuade himself that it was not a fact. He had put any thought of women's tenderness out of his life all these years; and now, unawares and unsought, one had come to him in his dreams! He felt himself claimed with such force that he could hardly distinguish between

memory of the pale girl he had only pitied and the creature who had smiled up at him lying against his heart and filling him with mingled happiness and agony.

The wind had risen and was keening round the stone gables. He had fallen asleep listening to it as it came rushing up the valley, chanting and surging through his woods, gathering force till it dashed itself against the old walls and drew away again moaning to the mountains. The whole of his wide acres was filled with the passage of the wind; his house stood lonely in the midst. What an empty place it had become for him; and how empty spread his life before him!

It was perhaps the melancholy of these last waking thoughts that had started him in sleep upon his uneasy quest.

Now that he was awake the great rumour still reached him from without, waxing and waning; Johnny was dead and Treowen desolate, and his arms were void: nothing but the bubble of a dream rose between himself and the cruel outstanding truth.

It seemed incredible that a dream could alter anything! Everything about him was the same, and yet everything within him was altered.

He had held her to his breast—that strange, unhappy, suffering child; and were he never to meet her again she would still go with him all his days.

CHAPTER V

The Passion of Young Hearts

AFTER their visit to Treowen, Peggy and Vivianne strayed into the schoolroom. The weather had turned out wet and wild; the rain was beating against the window, streaming down the panes.

Peggy shuddered at the desolate prospect outside, threw some logs on the fire, and invited Vivianne to take possession of one of the deep, cushioned, wicker arm-chairs that she drew creakingly to the hearth. Her own heart was very heavy but she felt she must not allow herself to appear despondent before this much more afflicted being. Peggy's little head was full of chaotic plans; her tender soul with pious resolutions. It was all she could do now to be good and unselfish and try and help others—the only way to make herself worthy of Johnny, who had given his life for his country.

The first work that lay before her was to comfort David; to help David to build up his home again; if possible to be the means of finding the right wife for him. Almost as pressing was the desire to be of service to Vivianne; she yearned to bind those wounds, heal those bruises, uplift that sinking spirit. Poor Vivianne! the more Peggy saw of her the more intense her pity had grown; and pity is truly akin to love in any womanly nature. Fantastically, the possibility of combining both missions kept returning to her mind. She recognised it as fantastic, but could not dispossess herself of the thought.

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She sat on the fender stool, her back to the fire, her elbows on her knees, her chin on her clasped hands, idly watching Vivianne's knitting fingers. Suddenly she said, feeling as though some unseen force were driving her :

"Do you think David—Mr. Owen—handsome?"

"I?" Vivianne's straight eyebrows were uplifted.

"I never thought of it. He seems to me quite elderly."

"Do you think him old?" Peggy was taken aback. "But he's not old."

"Certainly not young. I said elderly."

"That's worse. Why, he's only twelve years older than my Johnny. He's not thirty-three yet."

"He looks—he looks forty-three. More. There are grey streaks in his hair."

"Ah, there used not to be!" said Peggy sadly.

Vivianne was silent.

"I think David looks very handsome with the grey in his hair," went on Peggy after a pause.

Vivianne put down her knitting and stared into space. Then she said slowly :

"I do not like a man so black." She remained with her eyes fixed, looking, her companion thought, as if she were contemplating an actual presence. After a while she said: "Wait a moment, I will show you something."

When she returned she was holding a closed leather case, which she laid on Peggy's knees. Peggy opened it with anxious curiosity, well surmising whose image it was she was about to see. She remained long silent, gazing and pondering.

It was a face of singular and romantic beauty that she saw portrayed: the features bold, clean-cut, the eyes wide-set, inspired, almost a little mad-looking; the hair tossed back from a broad forehead; a forked beard and light up-curling moustache, not hiding the

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lines of a full, well-shaped, passionate mouth, where a faint conquering smile seemed to lurk.

The photograph had been taken with the latest perfection of modern art; and a cunning disposal of light and shade gave it almost the value of an etching: so admirably had the camera succeeded that even an impression of colour was manifest. Peggy at once perceived that this man had the same opaque pallor of skin as Vivianne herself, but that the hair was lighter: blond rather than of that depth of tint which made Vivianne's ardent tresses look actually dark. Her contemplation began to be haunted with a vague sense of recollection; she suddenly exclaimed:

"I know. It is Lohengrin!"

"Ah!" Vivianne caught the picture from her friend's hand and drew aside, gazing at it in her turn with frowning eyes. "Yes, you've understood. That is very well. That is well said. Lohengrin! If you could see him, you would indeed find how he suggests a hero out of the old, wonderful days—Lohengrin leaping out of the boat, a knight whose fit wear is silver armour, *chevaleresque*, mystic. Someone not quite human——"

Peggy had got up. Her face expressed doubt and disagreement. It was true the portrait had recalled a memory of beauty and unearthly romance, but the next moment there had been a fierce repudiation. Something intangibly evil had left, as it were, a poisonous after-taste. . . . Lohengrin! No, indeed—Lohengrin never wore that secret smile! Here was not the pure, mysterious knight, leaping to the rescue of a piteous Elsa. Here was the man who had refused himself to the call of his child-love in her utmost need; who had betrayed his fealty with a jesting lip. *Chevaleresque*? Alas, poor Vivianne!

"Do you wonder," said Vivianne, her voice deepen-

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ing into the chord of music and of life which was so often missing from it, "do you wonder that no man can seem handsome to me now; that this face should be stamped on my heart, so that I could not even tell ever again how any man looks?"

A moment or two Peggy was silent, repelled and appalled by a glimpse into a passion which was as the heart of a furnace compared to the delicate radiance of her own innocent devotion. Then her English common sense stirred her to protest.

"Yes, he's very handsome. And he might make a very good Lohengrin, playing his part on the stage. But, oh, Vivianne, it's written there—it's the face of a traitor!"

Vivianne had a sudden look of anger, almost as if she could have struck the speaker; but the flame went swiftly out of her eyes. She flung the photograph on the table.

"You are right," she said. "If it was not for that would I have this pain?" The gesture, the tone, betrayed an infinite heart-sickness.

Peggy was thinking of the truth of David's whole life, the steady self-abnegation, the quiet dignity of his sorrow—of his strong face and kind eyes, as she had last seen him, wounded and alone in his futureless house. If the man Vivianne loved had only been like David! The chain of reflection brought her back to her mad idea—madder than ever it seemed now with the revelation of that smouldering misery of ardour.

Vivianne returned to her chair and sat down, her clasped hands between her knees: it was the attitude Peggy had begun to associate with the bad moments.

"Oh, it must have been dreadful for you," she exclaimed, "when you got his letter!"

"It was the worst of all," replied Vivianne, only moving her lips.

"Were you really engaged? Or was it only, like me and Johnny, between yourselves?"

Instinctively Peggy felt she must try and break down the barrier of silence. The other raised her heavy white eyelids and looked up at her friend as she stood beside the table.

"It was arranged between the parents."

"Between the parents?"

"Yes, from the days when I was quite little. We are cousins."

Peggy took her old place on the fender stool. She had heard of foreign girls being thus disposed of by their family; but it seemed strange to be brought so close to the reality; stranger still that any bargain of the kind should be ratified by a depth of attachment such as this.

"He is my mother's cousin," pursued Vivianne. "She was a Princess Orlenska."

"Is he a prince?" asked Peggy, impressed.

"Yes, Prince Ladislav Orlenski. He is the son of my mother's uncle. My mother loved her land and her people always. When my sister was born she had said: 'That will be a little wife for Ladislav.' She wanted her to be Polish. She gave her a name from her own country. But when my father died, soon after I was born, and she had no son, she said Natacha must be the heir to our father, and I—and I must be her little *Polonaise*. I was eight when Ladislav came for the first time to Flesselles."

She fell silent; it seemed to Peggy as if memory engulfed her.

"Did you like him from the very beginning?"

"Oh, how can I tell you! He was eighteen then. He was like ivory and gold. His face was, one would

have thought, carved. When he spoke he had a voice that seemed to go all round one, holding and caressing. Already he was a great musician——”

Peggy drew a long breath. She had hated and despised this Ladislas ever since she had read his letter; and yet she could not help being fascinated by the description.

“When he played, it was like water running in moonlight. He played——” Vivianne broke off. “The first night I came here someone played a thing he used to play . . . I thought I was dying.”

“Oh, Vivianne!”

“I wish I was dead!”

“Vivianne, darling!”

“I thought he loved me. Last Christmas he was with us. It was a great old castle, Flesselles. Part of it, the Gothic hall—people used to come and see it—it was like a little cathedral, carved and echoing; and there was old, deep-coloured glass in the windows. One window, it was a wonder! All blue, every shade! Ladislas made music for it—last Christmas. He told me he loved me. He said I was like the picture of Princess Ludmilla in her youth—she was a great-grandmother of the Orlenskis, born herself of a royal house, and she was a saint and died quite young. And the peasants at Orlensk pray to her and say she works miracles. There is a great tomb there, in the church, where my cousin has his estates.”

Peggy was a little bewildered by this kind of kaleidoscope, in which royalty and holiness, Vivianne's unhappy love affairs, and the riches of her faithless betrothed were thus flung together. She fixed upon the most salient point of interest: that fragment of the exile's shattered life which—to pursue the simile—seemed to shine with a sinister fire out of the rest of the gleaming ruins.

"He told you that he loved you?"

"Ah, so often! I had a white velvet dress made in a kind of mediæval style. My mother spoilt me. I was not yet in the world; but she liked me to come down among our friends in the country. Above all, she liked to make me beautiful for Ladislás. She desired it so much, that marriage! And he was, oh"—Vivianne made a quick movement with her hands—"fastidious. He wanted nothing but loveliness—nothing but exquisite, soft, precious, delicate, wonderful things about him! It was all a necessity to him, for his artist's soul."

Vivianne paused—her lips were frozen into a smile of exceeding bitterness.

"That was why," she said at last, in trailing accents, "he turned from me. He could not help it. I know that quite well. I am no longer what he had loved. I am only a rag of fate!"

"Vivianne—don't! It's horrible."

"It is the truth. The Germans came, with fire and sword. The mother, who was so beautiful, and the sister, they killed. But that was not the worst thing the Germans did to me: they destroyed what Ladislás loved."

"Vivianne, this is wild nonsense—you are still the same!"

"No."

Peggy pressed her cold fingers against her burning forehead desperately. It was all perverted. It was life seen through the medium of black treachery—together darkened. But she had no words with which to help her friend to a saner outlook.

"If the Germans had not come I should be still in my paradise. This Christmas we were to be married at Flesselles. We were only waiting till I was past eighteen."

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Tears began to well into Peggy's eyes. She felt, vaguely, as if they were the tears which Vivianne could not shed.

There fell a long silence which presently was filled by the insistent boom of the gong.

"Heavens—tea already! ' It's quite dark too. I'm afraid we must go down."

Vivianne rose, gathered the photograph case from the table, and moved towards the door.

"I will wait for you on the stairs," said Peggy.

CHAPTER VI

A Convent the Resource

"I DON'T mind the two little women," said Lady Celia, "though they do chatter, chatter, enough to make one's head go round."

"An uncommon jolly little pair," said Sir Gwydyr. He was home on forty-eight hours' leave. His camp had been moved farther south, preliminary, it was joyfully bruited, to embarkation. "They will be a bit of company for you if we are off."

Lady Celia fixed her radiant orbs with a mixture of scorn and distress upon her husband's countenance, and said, parenthetically: "Oh, dear, I can't bear it," and immediately proceeded to demolish Sir Gwydyr's argument. "I never could make any companion, much less a friend, of such perfectly empty-headed creatures. Poor things, they're married straight out of the convent to some man as stupid as themselves. They don't take a bit of interest in anythin', not even the papers—with both their husbands out there! And they don't want to take an interest in anythin'."

The excellent baronet, who had found the twitter of the lively Belgian ladies the most agreeable after-dinner relaxation, hung his head and looked abashed. His wife continued with a faint triumph in her soft, drawling voice:

"But, as I said, I can put up with them—they're harmless; and I am sorry for them; and they're well bred. And anyhow, it's a comfort that they don't keep

dinnin' into one's ears how dreadful the war is and how miserable they are, as so many tiresome people do. We are all miserable," said Lady Celia, rolling her slow, golden eyes pathetically at her husband. "Our hearts are all broken, but what I say is, it is very bad taste to be always shyin' the bits at other people's heads!"

"Come, come, my darling," said Sir Gwydyr, whose mind was seldom able to follow the discursive flights of his wife's fancy, "you mustn't begin to talk as if I were in the firing line already. Goodness knows if we shall ever get out. They've kept the Westshires on the dangle these six weeks."

"I never thought you'd go out," said Lady Celia disconcertingly. "But there's plenty to break my heart as it is. Think of Peggy."

Sir Gwydyr looked first startled, then uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?" he asked quickly.

Lady Celia turned her gaze appealingly upwards to the gilt wreaths on the high ceiling—the conference was taking place in her boudoir, which was elaborately "Empire" in taste. Then she said, a fine thread of sarcasm once more blending with the suavity of her tones:

"Of course you wouldn't have noticed anythin'. She seems just the same to you, I dare say. Why, Goody"—Goody was Lady Celia's pet name for the husband to whom, in her own arbitrary fashion, she was devotedly attached—"she has not lifted up her head since Johnny was killed."

"Johnny—Johnny Owen?"

"What other Johnny?—who else did you think I meant?"

Perhaps part of the secret of Lady Celia's power was that, even when exasperated, she had an unruffled air; and speeches which in any other tones would have conveyed unpardonable offence, were so smoothly delivered.

that their actual meaning only filtered by degrees. In this instance, however, Sir Gwydyr was altogether absorbed by the subject matter.

"Good heavens!—Peggy? But she's a child. Oh, nonsense, nonsense! I dare say she's been a little upset, that's all. Poor little girl—her playfellow, what?"

"Peggy was just wrapped up in Johnny Owen, and Johnny was wrapped up in her. And she thinks her life is finished and that she will never marry now."

"Pooh, pooh! Nonsense! I never heard such nonsense in my life."

"She is only seventeen," pursued Lady Celia reflectively. "She really needn't marry till she's twenty-three or four—if there is anybody left to marry. And, of course, she'll forget in time. But I've got to see she isn't perpetually stirred up to remember. And that's the reason, Goody, why I want to get rid of that girl."

"That girl?"

"Really, it's too bad, dawlin'. I've been explainin' for half an hour. I don't believe you've listened to one word I've been sayin'."

"My darling, I'll take my oath you've never as much as mentioned——"

"It's not the least use puttin' yourself in a passion, dawlin', I'm not goin' to wrangle. The girl must go."

"The girl, that poor little white thing?—Made-moiselle de Flesselles, is that what you're driving at?"

"I consider her a very bad companion for Peggy. Last night she was in Vivianne's room till all hours. They talk over their sorrows—it's just destruction to Peggy."

Sir Gwydyr looked seriously perturbed. Peggy was the treasure of his heart, and any trouble concerning her touched him on the raw.

"You distress me extremely, Celia! I hadn't the least idea! Good heavens! She's a child—they were a pair of children."

"Well, never mind that now, Goody, Do try and keep to the point. I want to get that morbid girl out of the house."

"I don't see how it's to be managed—what harm is she doing? You tell me one minute that Peggy thinks her life broken and I don't know all, on account of Johnny—I wish to God we'd never had the boy about the place—and now you say it's the poor little refugee. You can't send her away like that, anyhow."

"You can leave that to me."

"It's too—it's too damned unkind!"

"Of course, if you're goin' to swear at me——"

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, darling. I hardly know what I'm saying—my little Peggy."

"I think you ought to be able to trust me to look after her. They cry together."

"What?"

"They cry together, I tell you. Would you rather Peggy went on crying?"

"What is it you want me to do," said the man, goaded. "To turn her out into the road?"

"No, Goody dear." Lady Celia knew that she had gained her end: she became caressing. "I want you to make yourself responsible for her pension in some nice convent. She will be much happier at the convent. I should like us to pay the full pension and any extras that would make her more comfortable. I don't want her to be taken on charity, or made a pauper of. We shall be as kind as possible: it's much the best thing for her—and for Peggy. I wouldn't have minded pay-in' for her myself, dawlin', only I really have so many expenses!"

"You can't think it's the money I mind," exclaimed

Sir Gwydyr in offended tones. "I'll give you a cheque to fill in."

"Thank you."

Lady Celia, having got the upper hand, rose and signified that the interview was at an end by graciously depositing a kiss on the top of her husband's head. Then, it being close on tea-time, she went down to the library, where she knew the Belgian ladies were toasting their feet by the fire. She was determined not to delay another instant in putting her plan in working order.

Two flushed and delighted faces and twin screams of pleasure greeted her.

"Only think, Lady Morgan," cried the Baronne—she still failed to unravel the intricacies of English social nomenclature—"the post has come, and we have each got letters from our husbands!"

"Oh, and think," cut in the Comtesse, "there is other news than that. We have each a trunk coming!"

And, in chorus, they proclaimed:

"We shall have clothes to wear. We shall no longer be quite like *femmes des chambres*."

"Everything in one trunk——"

"Not even a fur to fling on the shoulders."

"How nice," said Lady Celia. "But I'm sure you always look charmin'! One does want a bit of fur, though. And your young friend, Vivianne, has she, too, had news?"

Both the bright faces darkened.

"Ah, no, the poor one! From whom should she have any?" Madame Hollebeke had infused into her voice the proper tone of melancholy; but her more audacious sister interrupted, shrugging her shoulders:

"It is very sad for us, too. For, frankly, that poor Vivianne, with her long face, it is *assommante*!"

"And it is not even as if someone were likely to send her on a trunk," chimed in the Baronne, nothing

loath to cast off the mask of conventional pity. "Gabrielle and I, we had to buy her all the black she has on her back, and to confection her a frock for dinner beside. And it is not as if one had it to spare! Ah, *ces sales Bosches!* What they have stolen and pillaged!"

Lady Celia drew her chair close to the hearth, and in her turn stretched one superlative suède shoe to the warmth. She was too proud of her lovely feet to clothe them in anything but silk stockings—becoming, but indubitably cold.

"I'm very anxious about Mademoiselle Vivianne," she remarked dreamily.

"As for me, she exasperates me," cried Madame de Tirlemont. "She gets on my nerves!"

"I'm afraid she's not happy," pursued the hostess, in her drawl.

"Happy!" screamed the two little women together.

Then Madame Hollebeke laughed.

"Ah, dear Lady Morgan—that jumps to the eyes! And, *ma foi!* she has cause, the poor dear!"

"But what I complain of is: she won't let anybody else be happy," explained Madame de Tirlemont. "Everyone has the right to be unhappy, is it not so? But no one has the right to impose her misery upon the others. Only to see *cette figure blafarde*, one begins to think oneself of all one's misfortunes!"

"It's dreadfully sad," agreed Lady Celia, changing her foot on the fender. "I feel we are not doing the right thing for the poor child. She wants occupation——"

The Belgians looked at each other.

"What did I tell thee, Jeanne?" cried Madame Hollebeke. "If it had not been that my husband made me promise——"

"Ah, bah! Thierry would be the first to see that she would be far better at the convent—I ask you, what

life is it for a girl of her age, trailing herself about as she does, wrapped in her own woes? She will end by making an illness of it. Lady Morgan is a hundred times right. Vivianne wants to be made to study, to forget herself. The good nuns——”

“A convent?” interrupted Lady Celia. “Do you really think?—Oh, I always thought nuns such dawlin’ creatures. I’d have sent Peggy to the convent if her father would have let me. But he’s so dreadfully English and Protestant. I think that’s a wonderful idea of yours.”

She fixed her eyes, guilelessly admiring, on Gabrielle de Tirlemont’s face.

“But to tell the truth,” cried Madame Hollebeke, anxious to come in for her share of commendation, “it was I who first thought of it. A thousand times I have said to my sister: if we could only place her in a convent!”

“It would be much the best for her,” decided the Comtesse. “And the nuns might teach her to be a little pious, *en parenthèse!* No wonder she carries that despairing air. She is not resigned at all. I do not believe she ever prays. She was like wood beside me, in the little chapel, last Sunday.”

“Ah, without prayer . . .” exclaimed Madame Hollebeke, turning up her eyes.

“And what convent would you think?” asked Lady Celia presently in puffing, sleepy tones.

“*Mon Dieu*, there is Ramsgate——”

“St. Leonards one speaks very well of.”

“Roehampton would be delightful—but I am not sure if we could manage.”

The two Belgians once more consulted each other with their eyes. Madame Hollebeke shook her head.

“Ramsgate, I know, would take her,” she said.

Lady Celia raised herself from her languid attitude

and took her feet off the fender. How easy it had been ! Vivianne's guardians had only needed a little encouragement to carry through a long-cherished plan.

"Of course, I know Roehampton. Charmin' place. I motored down there once with a friend, a Roman Catholic. There was singin' in the little white chapel. I thought I'd love to be there myself : it made me feel so good !"

"Ah, if she could discover a vocation !"

"That would indeed be a solution."

"I'll write to the Reverend Mother and make arrangements for you, if I may."

"Oh, Lady Morgan—*c'est trop de bonté.*"

"She must remember me, I think," said Lady Celia with her beautiful smile. "I have just time to write to her now," she went on, "before tea."

"Oh, madame !" the duet of gratitude twittered again. "Why should you give yourself this trouble ? It is really too kind."

Lady Celia quite understood, through these protestations, that the Comtesse and the Baronne were willing to leave the financial part of the matter in her hands ; though they considered it both elegant and convenient to avoid any reference to it.

On her way to the writing-table the hostess paused : "You'll arrange it all, then, with Mademoiselle Vivianne ?"

There was a small but marked silence. The sisters exchanged the usual mute colloquy.

"*Mon Dieu*, of course !" said Madame Hollebeke, then, reluctantly, "of course, that will be quite easy."

"*A moins*," interjected the Comtesse, "that our good Lady Morgan would complete her amiability by making the poor child see reason. Sometimes one who is not a relation has more influence."

"Oh, and Vivianne has such a devotion already,

such an affection for Lady Morgan," assured Madame Hollebeke with equal enthusiasm and mendacity.

Lady Celia surveyed them serenely; she was extremely annoyed.

"I'm afraid I must leave it to you to settle with your young friend," she pronounced. "This is my house, you see. I can't turn her out of it." She waited a moment. As no reply came, she added: "I will now write to the Reverend Mother."

"Ah, very well, then," cried Madame Hollebeke, speaking with renewed cheerfulness at the idea of postponement. "When the good Mother answers you, and we know if she can have Vivianne, it will be time enough to speak."

"Certainly," corroborated her sister with a sigh of relief. "There would be no use in deranging the child, if we are not ourselves sure."

Lady Celia did not turn round.

"Oh, but we are quite sure. You had certainly better speak to-day. I shall arrange for her to go——"

Madame Hollebeke looked frightened.

"At once? Like that!"

"Oh, not before a week. Better still, ten days." Lady Celia might be relentless but she was well-bred. She was writing swiftly as she spoke: "I hope I shall keep her at least a week or ten days longer. And so I beg you"—here she did turn round to smile again—"I beg you to tell her when you speak to her to-day. She mustn't imagine, poor child, we want to get rid of her."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, no! that poor Vivianne!"

"Not for the world!"

The Belgian ladies were shocked at the bare idea.

"You can find a moment after tea, I dare say," concluded Lady Celia, and once more took up her pen.—"I

wonder," she said, rising presently, "why tea is so late."

She rang the bell. It wanted still a quarter of an hour of the proper time—but she desired to close the discussion. She also desired to clear the situation with the person most nearly concerned, and that with the briefest possible delay. When the injured butler had superintended the premature spreading of the tea-table, she ordered him to ring the gong.

Vivianne and Peggy came in, as she expected, together, and Lady Celia congratulated herself upon her strategy, as she glanced from one to the other. Peggy's face was flushed, with the shadow of tears under her eyes. Vivianne's countenance had its most unyouthful air of repressed intensity.

"Isn't it very early for tea?" asked Peggy petulantly. She surveyed the table with much disfavour. "I wish the cook wouldn't always send up those horrible drop-scones. It's enough to make one wish never to eat again!"

"Come and sit by me, dawlin'," said her mother with perfect equanimity. "Vivianne, my dear, have you got a chair?"

The little chattering ladies were strangely silent. It was not Vivianne's habit to speak in company unless absolutely forced to it. And Peggy, disgustedly crumbling a bun on her plate, seemed disposed to do nothing but cavil. Lady Celia had the burden of conversation all to herself. Apparently unaware of any constraint, her soft voice went drawling on:

"Two lumps of sugar, I think, madame? Three?—how stupid of me! And the Baronne, too?—yes, please help yourself. Mademoiselle Vivianne, will you kindly pass the scones to Madame de Tirlemont? Have one, Peggy dear, they're quite good. Father likes them, dawlin', if you don't. No, he's not comin'

to tea to-day; he is in the smokin'-room. You and I must go and have a little talk with him afterwards. You do understand, don't you?" she turned her appealing eyes on the visitors. "He's off to-morrow mornin' early. Yes, indeed, madame, we are very happy to have even that! Heaven knows how long it will last! Peggy, you must at least have a piece of bread-and-butter."

"How is it possible to eat," cried the girl, "when you talk of father like that?"

"Like what, dawlin'?—do be sensible. How flushed you are, Peggy! Have you been out? No? Sittin' over the fire all the afternoon! No wonder you can't eat. What were you doin'?"

Peggy glanced at Vivianne and hesitated a second.

"We were talking."

"You could have talked out of doors," said the mother. "But I'm afraid Miss Vivianne finds our hills very damp and depressin'. You might have taken the car, Peggy."

"I will, to-morrow," said Peggy. Then, jerking her little chin defiantly, "We are going to David, to-morrow."

"You were there yesterday, weren't you?"

"Yes, mother; I told you I was."

"You can't keep goin' to Treowen every day."

Peggy's steel-grey eyes flashed at the melting golden ones. Anyone looking at Lady Celia would have found nothing in her countenance but motherly solicitude; but Peggy knew that here was a tussle of wills. She had come down a prey to that form of sore-heartedness that expresses itself in irritability. She thought it unkind of her mother to draw attention to her friend's sadness, still more unkind the disapproval which she divined under the words.

"Poor David!" went on Lady Celia. "Of course!

He must be lonely—I think I will ask you to take me with you, if you're goin' to-morrow."

She continued to pour out tea and platitudes with that singular combination of composure and discontent which was characteristic of her. There was considerable uneasiness in her mind. Peggy was going to be silly and fractious over the business, that was quite evident. And if she did succeed in getting rid of that morbid companionship there would still be Treowen to deal with. This perpetual flying over to David was certainly not conducive to the laying of ghosts. What was to be done? She could not very well alter all her plans and go up to town for the winter, since the Belgrave Square house was turned into a hospital and a hundred claims kept her on the country estate. Besides, there were the tiresome refugees! She could not be continually sending the child away either; the round of visits had not been so successful after all, and she felt increasingly anxious to have her under her own eyes. Well, the unfortunate influence in Penarth itself must be first dealt with; Treowen at any rate was an external one.

"Come, dawlin'," she said, and got up. "Father's waiting for us. We shan't be long." She gave the sisters a sweet smile, and a long glance full of meaning and encouragement.

As the door closed on mother and daughter, Vivianne rose also. The Comtesse and the Baronne cast a guilty look at each other, then Madame de Tirlemont exclaimed, with a false jauntiness:

"How, Vivianne, do you abandon us?"

"Ah, that Vivianne!" cried Madame Hollebeke, following the lead, "she will have nothing to say to us. We are no longer anything, now that she has her Miss Peggy."

A swift gleam in her sister's eye brought her up short; that was certainly a *maladroit* move.

"On the contrary," said Madame de Tirlemont suavely, "it is we who have not been able to occupy ourselves with our dear little companion. It is difficult when one is in another's house. My poor child, I have remorse. I am afraid you feel yourself neglected."

"Ah," ejaculated Madame Hollebeke, precipitately taking up her cue. "She does her best, that dear Lady Morgan. But it is very sad here for us all. The country is of a profound melancholy. Oh, for Gabrielle and me it is a small matter; but for you, so young, you should have movement, distraction——"

Vivianne stood motionless, her pale hand still holding the back of the chair. Her gaze went slowly from one speaker to another.

"What is it you want of me?" she said at last.

Madame Hollebeke looked like a startled rabbit that would fain dive down its hole.

"But, nothing, my little Vivianne!" she exclaimed. "How strange you are! Only we never see you these days. A little talk, that was all——"

Madame de Tirlemont shrugged her shoulders. And when Vivianne, turning to her, said: "But you—perhaps you have something you wish to say, madame?" she was no more ready than her companion!

"I? *Mais non!* What should I want to say?" she exclaimed with some ill humour and walked over to the fireplace.

Vivianne drew a deep breath, pressed her lips together, and went out of the room.

"Ah, truly, *ma chérie*, thou art a little—a little stupid," cried the Comtesse over her shoulder.

"Thou hast not acquitted thyself so brilliantly either!" retorted the other.

"Ah, bah, considering that she is thy husband's relative, it certainly was not for me to——"

Madame Hollebeke exploded:

"As for that, it was easy, was it not? She gets on my nerves, she bores me, she kills me with her melancholy, but one has a heart in the end. When I saw her standing there, that victim, with her poor hand pressing the chair, I should have had to be as brutal as a *Bosche* to tell her we want to be rid of her. She's not stupid, Vivianne, she would have understood very well what it meant. One may roll as many fine phrases as one will about her good and her benefit—she would have understood at the first word. And I can't do it. I won't do it. I meddle no more with it. Let Lady Morgan arrange herself! At bottom it is just selfishness with her: she wants to disembarrass herself of the poor girl. It is horrible!"

"She will not make it very pleasant for us, Lady Morgan," said Gabrielle after a pause.

"*Eh bien, quand même,*" said Madame Hollebeke, "I prefer that. I could sooner have stuck a knife into a fawn than tell that unhappy one that she is not wanted here."

CHAPTER VII

An Expedient that Foundered

LADY CELIA came down early that night hoping to have a word in private with the Belgian ladies, who were punctuality itself. Peggy was often late, Vivianne always waited for her; and Sir Gwydyr—his wife had seen to it—was immersed in his evening paper in the inner room. At the first glance she cast upon them the Englishwoman knew that her allies had failed her; nevertheless she pretended confidence, and said pleasantly:

"Well, I hope Mademoiselle Vivianne is pleased with our arrangement?"

"Figure to yourself——" began Madame Hollebeke, and broke off embarrassed, to cast an appealing look at her sister. The latter, however, ostentatiously moved away and sat down apart.

Lady Celia pondered a moment, her fair face darkening; then she turned with an inquiring smile upon the Baronne.

"You were just goin' to tell me, weren't you, what Vivianne thinks of our little plan?"

"Oh, to say truth, we had not the opportunity to discuss it." Madame Hollebeke coloured to the roots of her hair. "My sister and I were wondering," she went on, plunging into fiction, "whether it were worth while to place her in the convent yet. Some of her relatives will probably be communicating with us."

"You mean you've changed your mind?"

"We?—not at all!" There was a glint in the honey-coloured orbs which Madame Hollebeke did not find at all reassuring. "Only"—then her native frankness overcame prudence: "*Elle me fait quand même pitié, cette enfant.*"

The gong at this moment boomed out from the hall; and Sir Gwydyr, his face rubicund as the setting sun, came into the room.

"Those famous Prussian Guards!—we've given them a taste of British steel, anyhow! Did you read the last news, Celia?"

"Oh, what a joy!" cried the Belgians, eagerly welcoming the diversion.

"I wish you wouldn't talk war just before dinner," complained Lady Celia. "Peggy, dawlin', the gong sounded some time ago. You know father hates to be kept waitin' for his dinner."

For a wonder Penarth had no guests except the refugees. As household after household became stricken in its turn, even Lady Celia found it difficult to keep up the constant distraction of visitors. She now swept her diminished party imperiously into the dining-room.

Only for Sir Gwydyr's guileless and garrulous good humour, ably sustained by each lively neighbour, the meal would have been an unusually dismal one; for at the other end of the table the hostess, flanked by Vivianne and Peggy, was wrapped in almost continuous silence. Her face, however, remained placid, and she smiled so sweetly at her husband, whenever he addressed her, that he was far from guessing the annoyance that seethed in her mind. She very well understood that the Belgian ladies were now of no use to her. Even if, by continued pressure, she were to force them to do her will, the odium would so inevitably fall upon her, that she might as well have undertaken the whole unpleasant business herself. This—relentless as she usually was

in her decisions, and, here justified in her own mind by maternal solicitude—she could not now bring herself to do. Every instinct rose against the thought. The child was her guest—an orphan—afflicted incredibly: to cast her forth, even to an assured shelter, was a breach, not only of individual but of national hospitality.

She began to evolve another set of plans. Might it not be better to deal with all three together? Those tiresome little women had themselves started the idea of the convent: that was the worst of foreigners, you never knew if they really meant what they said. She did not feel as if she could endure them much longer in the house. Could not the whole party be shunted to the hospitality of some benevolent friend? Could she not herself establish them in apartments or in a little house in London upon the excuse of a general move? At first sight the suggestions seemed plausible enough, but the instant she began to settle the details of action insuperable objections reared themselves. "I'll have to give it up," she thought irritably as she rose from the table.—The knot, after all, was unexpectedly cut for her that evening.

Lying back in the deepest arm-chair before the drawing-room fire, after a super-excellent dinner and one prime cigar—his allowance in war time—Sir Gwydyr, always the most genial of men, looked round upon the circle with a warm stirring of his heart towards each individual member of it.

Peggy was sitting at his feet, her head against his knee; and now and again his big hand passed caressingly over the soft curls. Lady Celia sat opposite, her white fingers with their flashing rings, moving swiftly through the khaki wool she was knitting.

"Upon my word, Celia, it's worth while being away in camp for the pleasure of coming back! No place like home. Beg pardon, Comtesse, stupid thing for me to

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say before you ! But then, you know, we hope that you feel this is your home. Eh, what, Celia ? Privilege to have you with us. Upon my word it is, Madame la Baronne. Putting aside the pleasure—society of charming ladies like yourself, charming, charming, no compliment—England can never show Belgium proper appreciation. Good God ! your country's gallantry ! Can't express my feelings in the matter. England can never pay her debt. Never, never. Hey, Celia ? Honour, privilege, a pleasure to receive these ladies here ! Poor people in the villages, too. Heart-breaking. Everyone welcome—more than welcome ! ”

“Sir Morgan is too kind,” said Madame de Tirlemont, with tight lips.

“*Hélas*—poor exiles that we are ! ” said Madame Hollebeke. Neither of them relished the connection with the village refugees, nor cared to be lumped in with England's debt of honour.

“I'm sure it's delightful for me to have them here to cheer me up while you are away,” tactfully murmured Lady Celia.

“That's what I say. That's what I say,” pursued the undaunted Welshman.

He was smiling broadly, his twinkling eyes passing from face to face. Suddenly they fell on Vivianne, sitting pale and silent in her usual corner against the white marble column of the chimney-piece. She, too, was knitting; her bloodless hands moving slowly, her eyelids cast down. The baronet's jovial expression became slightly clouded. He cleared his throat and started in a lower key :

“I hope Mademoiselle Vivianne will be very happy at the convent. Can't say I care very much about convents myself, but——”

He broke off. Even his obtuse wits could not but be aware of the extraordinary commotion his innocent

kindliness had caused. For a moment the silence was intense and unpleasant. Peggy started violently. Vivianne, raising her eyes and dropping her hands, turned her gaze quickly upon Sir Gwydyr and then upon each of her compatriots, who flushed scarlet.

"What nonsense you're talkin'," began Lady Celia. But before Sir Gwydyr could protest, Peggy sprang to her feet.

"Father, what do you mean?"

"Well, my darling, ask your mother. She will tell you all about it. She knows I didn't approve."

"Mother!" There was a passion of reproach in the cry.

Lady Celia grew pale. Hardly anyone had ever spoken to her like that in all her spoilt life, much less her own child! Vivianne took up her knitting again, but her hands shook so much she had to put it down.

"*Mon Dieu!*" began Madame de Tirlemont, "Sir Morgan, it was only said in the air, like that."

"We happened just to mention—to mention to Lady Morgan," interrupted Madame Hollebeke, "that it might become a duty—for our dear Vivianne's education—and Lady Morgan thought——"

Lady Celia found the situation almost unbearable. There was Peggy stampeding, and Vivianne looking like death—she could not help feeling sorry for Vivianne! And those two silly creatures, babbling and making everything ten times worse. And her own Goody frowning and purple, ready to fall on her too! She was, for half a minute, absolutely nonplussed.

"Mother!"—Peggy's voice commanded and entreated at once—"it's not true! Say it's not true!"

Lady Celia gathered herself together. Had she been of the stuff of which the two sisters were made, she would have taken the easiest way out and promptly

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disclaimed any complicity in the matter. But honour and convenience alike upheld her.

"Peggy, dear, sit down and don't ramp in that manner.—It's quite true, Vivianne, that your friends and I came to the conclusion to-day that you would be happier away from here. It would be better for you to be in a nice convent, where you could pursue your studies. You are too young to give up lessons yet, you know. You don't look well. I don't think we make you happy, you're too lonely. It is entirely for your sake, my dear."

Vivianne rose and Lady Celia stopped; even to her own ear her words rang hollow.

"Well, all I can say is," blurted Sir Gwydyr, "I never approved of it.—Poor little girl!—Hate convents. Lonely!—Hasn't she got Peggy here? What? What? You know, Celia, I didn't—" He, too, fell silent as Vivianne began to speak.

"Thank you, madame," she said, and smiled. "I—I am grateful for your kindness. Thank you, too, Cousin Jeanne, and you, madame." She turned from Madame de Tirlemont to Lady Celia again. "If you will permit it, I will go to my room."

Sir Gwydyr struggled to his feet.

"Now, now, now!" he exclaimed, following the girl and patting her shoulder. "Don't you run away with any notion that we want to get rid of you. On the contrary, we all want to keep you. Hey, Celia? 'Pon my word, I say we won't let you go. Not a bit of it." Vivianne paused a second. Her young face was so white and drawn that his kind heart was shocked. He broke into stammering: "What, what, what! We'll keep you at Penarth. What——"

"Thank you, sir, but I must go."

"Nonsense!" repeated Sir Gwydyr. "Keep you here. Nonsense about these convents. What?"

"I do not think it will be to a convent."

Vivianne made the statement with great deliberation. Then she opened the door and went out.

"Mother," stormed Peggy, "I'll never forgive you!" She burst into loud sobs, dashed past her father as he tried to stop her, and flung herself out of the room in the wake of her friend.

"Leave her alone," said Lady Celia, without moving. Sir Gwydyr stood disconsolate, uneasily rubbing his chin.

"*Ah, mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" said Madame Hollebeke. "I knew how it would be. It is too cruel. Ah, that poor child!—after what she has suffered, and she all alone!"

Madame de Tirlemont shrugged her shoulders. The movement expressed all her satisfaction at having remained quite outside the matter. Lady Celia rolled up her wool and stuck her needles into the ball.

"I think you might as well go and smoke another cigar, Goody, for once. You've done quite enough talkin' for to-night.—Hadrn't we better all go to bed?" The look she cast on her visitors was distinctly cold.

"As for me," cried Madame Hollebeke, as she rose too, "I am quite ready. I want to run to that poor little Vivianne, and tell her she has absolutely misunderstood. May I not, Lady Morgan?"

"I think, certainly not," said Lady Celia.

"Ah, that woman!" said Madame Hollebeke a few minutes later, as she drew in comfortably to her sister's bedroom fire. "But I begin not to like her any more. She has a heart of stone, that one."

"My dear," said Gabrielle, pulling tortoiseshell pins out of her fluffy hair, "I never was mad on her, you know—that Lady Celia of yours. But, since it is done

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after all, it will be, my faith, much more agreeable for us, once that poor unfortunate girl is safe in her convent."

"She said she would not go to any convent."

"Bah! she'll have to go. What else can she do?"

"I don't know," said Madame Hollebeke, under her breath, "*elle me fait peur, cette fille.*"

"That is only your nerves. Do me the pleasure to ring your bell for my fat Suzanne. We are sent to bed with the hens to-night. I bet she is still stuffing herself in the servants' hall."

Lady Celia went slowly to her own room. She wrote two or three letters; according to custom, read, with great but completely impersonal piety, a chapter of the Bible, then rang for her maid. Solemnly, silently, she permitted herself to be disrobed, enfolded in an immense quilted, much-belaced white silk dressing-gown—Lady Celia had an elegant speciality of white in her bedroom—and sat down before the silver mirror.

Her thoughts were revolving perplexedly. It was her instinct, in any conflict, to avoid discussion, excitement, anything approaching a scene; and she had learned by experience how much these tactics facilitated the carrying through of her own purpose. It would be far better to leave everyone concerned severely alone to-night. Peggy had behaved most unbecomingly; the morrow would probably find her in a different frame of mind. But Lady Celia was reckoning without her own heart. The child had not said "Good night!" Such a thing had never happened before, that Peggy should go to bed without the last kiss and blessing from her mother.

Then the episode downstairs had left Lady Celia with a sense of discomfort. She did not admit the possibility

that the unusual feeling could be remorse; but she went so far as to wish ardently that she had left things alone for the present.

"Has Miss Peggy gone to bed?" she asked her maid, indifferently, from between the loosened coils of her flowing hair.

The highly respectable tirewoman, whom Lady Celia had trained and drilled into something nearly resembling an automaton, paused surprised.

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea, my lady."

Her mistress impatiently wheeled away from her touch, pushing the hair off her face.

"You can go to bed, Stilman. I shan't want you any more."

"Not want me any more, my lady?"

"No, I don't want my hair brushed."

"Not want your hair brushed, my lady?"

"No. Didn't you hear me say you could go to bed?"

"Yes, my lady. Thank you, my lady! Good night, my lady!"

"What are those two girls about?" Lady Celia asked herself with disquietude, as she coiled up her long tresses again and petulantly flung on her lace cap. She walked aimlessly about the room, went out into the passage in an inconsequent way, and looked towards Peggy's door at the far end. Presently she found herself advancing towards it. "I'm sure she's not there; I'm sure she's making a fuss with Vivianne," she thought. Irritability lay over a very real anxiety. She turned the handle and looked in. The little rosebud bower was, as she had expected, empty. She penetrated into the room and put another log on the fire, paused vaguely by the miniature four-post bed and patted the turned-down sheet. Then she trailed once more back into the passage, said to herself, "It's much the best

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thing to leave them quite alone!" yet immediately directed her steps towards the visitors' corridor.

Here the lights were out, and Lady Celia had to grope for the switch. Then she started. There was a small, hunched-up figure in a pink dressing-gown crouching outside the door of Vivianne's room, a dark, curly head bent forward nearly to the knees. Her heart contracted. What could it mean? Was the child crying? Was she asleep? Very seldom had Lady Celia moved so quickly as she did now.

"Peggy?"

The girl raised her head, showing a tired, frightened face. She stared at her mother, and made no attempt to speak or rise.

"Peggy, get up this minute! Why, dawlin', you're as cold as ice. My poor little girl!"

Peggy burst into tears. "Oh, what shall I do? She won't let me in. I'm so frightened!"

"Frightened?" Lady Celia herself turned pale, a sudden, dark circle appeared round her eyes. "Why, what do you mean?"

"She's locked herself in"—Peggy's teeth were chattering—"and, oh, she's been sobbing so dreadfully!"

"Sobbing!" The relief which Lady Celia felt was cheerfully reflected in her tone. "Poor child! Well, Peggy, leave her alone. It wouldn't be kind to force yourself upon her. Come to bed, dawlin'. She's probably asleep by this time."

The mother encircled the slender, trembling body with a firm arm. Peggy went a few paces, then delicately disengaged herself.

"Very well, mother, I'll go to bed."

Lady Celia felt an intensity of rebellion under the semblance of obedience. She paused and looked distressedly at her child.

"Peggy, you'll break my heart!"

"I'm sorry, mother."

"Can't you trust me to do what's best for you and for Vivianne too? Can't you see I'm only tryin' to do the best?"

There was surprise, but there was also unplaced indignation, in the gaze the girl turned upon her mother.

"You've made me very unhappy," she said at last; her voice tripped up with a catching breath. "I was unhappy enough before; I'm ten times more miserable now."

She quivered into tears again, shaken with emotion like some tender sapling caught by the gust. Then she started running towards her own room, the sound of her quick sobs flying behind her.

"Oh, dear, how horrible everythin' is!" said Lady Celia.

Her own eyes misted. The shadow of the war to come between her and her child!

CHAPTER VIII

Diverting the Torrent

IN the luxury of her white-and-rose bed Peggy tossed and turned the whole night. She scarcely slept at all.

"What shall I do?" she had cried to her mother. "What shall I do?" remained the burden of her thought. She had to do something. Between her weak hands the fate of Vivianne lay. In these past days, during which they had been growing inevitably closer to each other, she had come to understand very clearly the dangerous condition of her unfortunate friend's overwrought mind. A weight of misery had been laid upon Vivianne which might well have crushed any less intensely vital nature: she had not been crushed, but she had been warped. Her grief had taken the turn towards bitterness which leads to despair. And now it was, Peggy told herself in an ague of apprehension, her own mother's hand which had thrust the tormented soul toward destruction.

The accent with which Vivianne had said to Sir Gwydyr, "I must go; I do not think it will be to a convent," had struck upon Peggy's heart. There had been something irrevocable, terrifying, in the very calmness with which the words had been said.

She had knocked and pleaded in vain outside the locked door. At first Vivianne had answered, with sufficient self-control: "Please leave me. Please go; I am tired." And Peggy had gone to her room and undressed. But by and by, irresistibly pressed by

anxiety, she had returned, feeling her way along the dark passage, and very gently tried the handle of the door. It was still locked.

She had listened for some stir within, and then in the black silence of the great house had come the sound of a long-drawn sob, a sound of anguish such that it seemed as if breath itself had to be wrested from a suffocating depth of agony. She had called then, and knocked, and once more implored and passionately protested. But the only answer had been a partial stifling of the piteous weeping.

Peggy had not been able to bring herself to leave her post. Since she could not assuage, could not even clasp or kiss, or hold the forlorn hands, she felt she must at least share the dreadful vigil. Useless devotion of every generous heart: to share, if unable to aid!

But, as she tossed in her little bed the long night through, Peggy's energies were bent on aid—she could have no peace till she had found some way. She knew herself strong enough to overrule father and mother and keep Vivianne at Penarth, but with the girl herself she realised that she must fail. When Vivianne had risen from her quiet corner and stood in the midst of the circle, she had been pride personified. "Thank you, Lady Celia . . . and thank you, too, madame!"

"It's all she had left," thought Peggy, clasping her hands in the dark, "and this is the final wound!"

Vivianne, who had cried out against the bread of charity, the garments of charity, the shelter of charity, to be told in so many words—for that was what it came to—that they were grudged to her, it was too cruel! The shame of her mother's action dyed Peggy again a miserable crimson as she lay, palpitating in the darkness. Nothing could put that right again at Penarth. It was an affront which no explanation could cover, no

repentance atone for. To the marrow of her own pride Peggy knew this. "What's to become of her?" she thought frantically. What did Vivianne mean to do? Where could she go? What was to become of her? Innocent flower of girlhood as Peggy was, she knew well enough that youth and loveliness and poverty cannot safely go unprotected in the world. Vivianne above all with her strange, apart beauty! Was there ever any creature so abandoned, so helpless, so pursued by Fate?

At the first stirring in the house, Peggy crept out of bed and turned on the light. She went to the window and pushed aside her rose-strewn curtain; there was a grey glimmer against the panes: the livid face of the November morning looking in upon her. She trembled with cold as she began to clothe herself. Never, in all her pampered little life, had she known what it was to get up without a fire, without hot water, without the help of a maid, without the delicate stimulant of the bedside cup of tea. She felt tired and stupid after her troubled night; almost as if she were not herself at all, but some awkward, inept personality whom she had to encourage and hustle along. She found herself talking in her own mind to this tiresome being: "If you were to wash your face, you might feel different. . . . Yes, I know it's cold water, but you'll be better afterwards. . . . Why not slip on a fur coat? Now that's an improvement!"

She began to feel almost Peggy again. The shock of the icy sponge and the subsequent glow had strengthened the tired nerves. Two opposite purposes conflicted together in her mind. To seek Vivianne and stick to her, as she said in her girlish phraseology, like grim death. To go to Treowen and consult David. . . .

These were not purposes that could be combined. She paused, her hands thrust into the pockets of her grey squirrel motor-coat. Her tiny silver clock had only just chimed the half-hour after six. If she took her own little car at full speed, there might be ample time to go to Treowen and return before Vivianne was up and dressed. Her mother had said she would sleep after her tears, and Peggy knew very well how heavily one lay after crying oneself to sleep.

Through the intense dark silence of the house she made her pilgrimage once again. Everything seemed very still in Vivianne's room; but her own heart beat so loud, as she bent to listen, that it confused her hearing. Very delicately she turned the handle, the door yielded; a sharp angle of light startled her as she flung it open.

Vivianne was standing before the dressing-table. She wheeled round. She was clad for going out, with hat and travelling cloak, the long ends of her blue gauze veil floated down either side of her face. The two stared as if each thought the other a ghost. Then Peggy caught sight of a small travelling bag standing on the table, and cried piercingly:

"Oh, Vivianne!——"

Vivianne glanced in the same direction.

"I must go," she said.

"Where? What will you do?" These were the questions Peggy had asked herself all night.

"I don't know; but I must go."

Then Peggy cried:

"Wherever you go, I go!" There are difficulties that solve themselves with a single leap of the heart. She had not known how she could help, but now it had come to her.

"Peggy!" Vivianne spoke faintly.

Peggy sprang to her and caught her close; she was

full of courage and warmth. The horrible, intangible dread that had pursued her ever since last night was gone, driven away by the light of her own resolve. No evil could happen if she were there to guard and defend.

"Oh, don't make it worse," exclaimed Vivianne. "I am so tired! If you keep me here, you kill me."

"I won't keep you. Where were you going?"

"I don't know. I thought I might get work in London. There is a bureau where they help my people—the quite destitute, like me."

"You were going to walk to the station, I suppose. Have you any money?"

"I have some francs."

"But, dear, you know, this is quite mad!"

The other girl turned her slow gaze—even a child like Peggy could see that the limit of endurance had been reached—then she stretched out her hand for her travelling bag.

"At least I will drive you," said Peggy, humouring her. "I'll drive you myself, but first we must both have a cup of tea. They're awake downstairs, I know. Father is off at half-past seven.—One minute, Vivianne."

"I couldn't."

"Couldn't what?"

"Eat or drink again in this house."

"Very well, then," said Peggy, after a second's pause. "We'll be off without it. I'll tie your veil. Now, I'll carry your bag. What about your luggage?"

"I'm not taking any more than this. It's not mine, either. Nothing is mine, hardly."

"One minute," repeated Peggy, "I must get my hat."

Seizing upon the bag as hostage, she flew to her room, flung on her fur cap, caught up her gloves and a

chain purse containing some loose gold out of a drawer, and ran back to the guest's corridor. Vivianne had wandered out into the passage; but Peggy, without comment, took her by the arm, and drew her down the back stairs.

A sleepy maid was mopping the flags, and there were signs of activity in the yard, where Sir Gwydyr's car had already been rolled out of the garage. The men were probably at breakfast, thought Peggy, thankful to find the door unlocked. She went to her own machine, satisfied herself that there was sufficient oil in the tank, and vigorously began to wind. A chauffeur rushed out at the sound, but stopped astonished at sight of the two young ladies. Peggy straightened herself and turned her flushed face upon him.

"Just wheel it out, please, Collins. I'm off for a spin."

She stood watching while her orders were obeyed, then sprang into her seat.

"Get in, Vivianne.—Oh, I say, is Sir Gwydyr's rug in there? Chuck it here, will you? Wrap it round the young lady—tight. That's all right." She started the machine, then called out over her shoulder: "Tell Sir Gwydyr I may perhaps be at the station to see him off. And get him another rug."

The little car flew off, cheerily humming, through the open courtyard gate, gathering fine speed as it reached the back drive.

In spite of all the serious reasons Miss Morgan had for sorrow, anxiety and doubt, she was feeling distinctly elated. Love of adventure runs in the blood of healthy youth. Vivianne, who had instinctively pulled the blue gauze over her face as they stepped into the yard, sat beside her without word or movement. Peggy drove daringly, but well; she blew her horn so peremptorily when they approached the lodge that the

gates were already opened when the car buzzed into sight; and with a triumphant curve, its driver sped it out on the high road.

When they had gone about a mile between the bare hedges and sodden fields Peggy slowed down.

"Now," she cried, "the question is what are we really going to do? I might take you to the station. Father will be there. I believe I could get him to let us go up to London with him. I can do anything with father. But suppose we get to London, what shall we do then? You know, Vivianne, I'm not going to leave you."

From behind the blue veil only an inarticulate murmur answered. Half impatient, half terrified, Peggy slipped off her thick glove and drew aside the folds of gauze from her friend's face. At the sight of its pallor she felt her own countenance grow cold. Determinedly, however, she pulled herself together.

"I'll tell you what's the matter with you—with us both. We want breakfast. I'm sure I do. I'd take you to Treowen; but I don't know. David mightn't like us quite so early. Oh, I have it!" She gave a cry of inspiration. "How stupid I am! There's Mrs. Jones—Gracious-to-Goodness! Ah! dear, that's what my Johnny used to call her. She was our dairywoman at Penarth, and she lives in David's village. You're not listening. Oh, Vivianne darling, do hold up. We'll be there in a moment."

The bleak wind which had stimulated Peggy like a cup of iced wine seemed to have struck chill upon her companion. When they drew up before the comfortable, deep-eaved, thatched cottage which stood in its garden a little on the outskirts of the village of Bwlchlin, Peggy flung an arm round the drooping figure by her side, and shouted vigorously for help. Vivianne, however, was not fainting; by the time Mrs.

Jones, all amazement and haste, came waddling down the flagged path, she found the two girls emerging from the car.

"Miss Margaret! Gracious to goodness, Miss Margaret! And what brings you here, whatever?"

"Oh, I can't explain, Jonesie. Get us a cup of tea, quick, quick! Oh, Jonesie, don't say your kettle is not boiling!"

"Gracious to goodness!" ejaculated the cottage dame again. But like most old servants she was ready for emergencies, and instantly encircling an arm—about the size and consistency of a good bolster—round Vivianne's waist, hoisted her up the path, into the cottage, parenthetically addressing her as ladybird between her panting breaths.

To have been long in the service of Penarth meant retirement on an idyllically comfortable scale. Mrs. Jones's cottage was a picture of bowery delight in spring, summer and autumn; in winter it might have been taken for the model Christmas card, especially if its door were open as now, giving a glimpse of ruddy hearth, brick floor, red in the firelight, deep-winged arm-chair at the angle of the fender, and a tortoiseshell cat, washing its face luxuriously within the circle of warmth.

Puss fled before the strange procession, but the arm-chair was put into instant use.

"And indeed, yes, yes, the young lady do look poorly, Miss Margaret."

Vivianne sank down into the red cushions, and allowed Peggy to untie the blue veil, loosen the collar of her cloak and pull the gloves off her hands. She was not unconscious, but dazed and exhausted.

Mrs. Jones's kettle was boiling and a comfortable black pot was already provided with tea and warming on the hob, for she had been, as she repeated, on the very step of sitting down to breakfast.

Peggy, who was developing common sense in the midst of her wild escapade, speedily presented a cup of this brew—hot, strong and sweet—with so much firmness that half of it was drunk before protest could be uttered. It was more difficult to get food down; but she waxed stern, and insisted so urgently, that in the end it was easier for her patient to give in than to refuse.

Then Peggy stood back and surveyed the result. The colour had returned to the girl's lips; her eyes no longer looked so overwhelmingly dark and large. Miss Morgan nodded, dragged a patchwork footstool forward, and remarked :

"You lie still now and get warm. I'm going to finish up dear old Jnesie's breakfast for her."

"And gracious to goodness," cried the ex-dairy-woman, "and if anyone was welcome, whatever!"

It was a very comfortable and agreeable meal to Peggy. She thought the thick slices of bacon, bubbling in their earthenware pie dish, the most delicious thing she had ever eaten. And though Mrs. Jones shook her head sadly over the butter, and said she wondered indeed what had come to folk nowadays who would not be satisfied with the hands God Almighty had given them, but must be messing the good milk with machines and trash—which it was no wonder it got into the butter, whatever—her guest contrived to dispose of it with great satisfaction on slice after slice of the wheaten loaf.

Mrs. Jones was, of course, commanded to join in her own repast; and the teapot had to be replenished, for she was very particular about her tea, and liked it with a bit of body in it—as the fashion is with most old ladies of her class.

The conversation was very brisk between them across the white tablecloth; and the hostess, as in duty

bound, inquired about the Master and the Lady and each young gentleman in turn. And Peggy answered elaborately, after which they exchanged comments upon the Kaiser.

"Gracious to goodness, I'm beginning to think that's not a very good man, Miss Margaret!"

From this topic the talk naturally glided upon the poor Belgians, for whom Mrs. Jones vowed you could not but feel sorry. Peggy flung a look at the arm-chair, and her hostess put a plump, toil-worn forefinger to her lips, and opened round, questioning eyes. Peggy nodded three times with great emphasis. And Mrs. Jones ejaculated:

"Dear, to be sure, is that the case indeed?" And, lowering her voice, further wondered, in a creaking whisper, how anybody could find it in their heart to be unkind to such a sweet young lady. "But those Germans, it's little principle they seem to have at all. You heard of the poor woman I had here, Miss Margaret, there's tales she could have told, if she could have spoke a word of the language! But there and indeed, it was a living tale to see her. It was to the madhouse they had to take her. Indeed, yes, yes; there's too sad talking for you, miss. And it's Mrs. Price, of Mr. Owen of Treowen, that took the little girl."

"Do you mean the darling little roly-poly they called Boulotte?"

"Some such heathen name indeed, Miss Margaret. Bullet, yes—along of the war, I'm thinking, and the poor mother having the brain turned on her."

Peggy, with eyes and mouth wide open, sat a moment very still, as if she were on the point of snapping at some flying thought with her pretty lips. Then she bent forward and asked eagerly:

"You had the poor woman here? Of course, you

take lodgers, I remember. Would you mind? Oh, Jonesie, will you let us lodge with you?"

"Gracious to goodness, Miss Margaret!"

"I know it's a great big bed upstairs. Oh, you can't think—you can't imagine what a providence you'd be! You've saved me—us! You've solved the problem; you're the goddess out of the machine! Oh, Jonesie, let me come and hug you! It's the most perfect thing that could have happened. Only three miles across the fields to Treowen!"

Mrs. Jones grew more and more bewildered, and when it came to the last phrase she fumbled for her glasses to assure herself that her little Miss Margaret had still the air of one in possession of her senses. . . . To be sure, the honour of the company of the young ladies . . . but indeed, and what did her Ladyship say? Perhaps Miss Margaret was only making fun of a poor old woman. Not but what everything Mrs. Jones had was not for the taking of the house. Gracious to goodness, yes, yes, she hoped she knew her grateful duty! But Miss Margaret was young. Let it not seem disrespectful and forward to say so, whatever.

Peggy interrupted the flow of soft sing-song; and, seeing that the old woman was really exercised in her mind to distress, she said earnestly:

"Jonesie, I can't explain it to you now. But you may be quite happy. I shall make it all right at Penarth."

She stood reflecting, a frown over her bright eyes; then she went round the table, and peeped at the occupant of the arm-chair. A smile irradiated her face. Tiptoe she came back to the old woman, whispering:

"Asleep! Splendid!—Jonesie dear, I'm going to leave her here. Don't disturb her for your life. But

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if she wakes, tell her I shall be back in an hour or so."

"Gracious to goodness, Miss Margaret!——"

Peggy stopped all further protest by a kiss on the wrinkled-apple cheek, pulled her fur cap ruthlessly over her curls, put on her gloves, opened the cottage door softly and slipped out.

CHAPTER IX

A Mad Suggestion

THE wind had blown the mist away from the earth and rolled the clouds from across a great arch of blue sky, through which sunshine was pouring upon the world. The keen air was full of the indescribable purity left by a night of frost; it was fragrant, too, of wood smoke wafted from cottage hearths, and the aromatic essences of dead leaves and dying herbage. As Peggy was carried forward she felt her heart rise and fall with conflicting tides. How peaceful Vivianne had looked in her sleep . . . as if the tormentor had left her! Oh, it was good, it was comforting to help! God was over all to bless. So her thoughts soared.

Then came the sinking. The turn of the road brought her to the river banks: away to the left in the distance stood Treowen, dominating the valley; and on the right spread David's pastures, hemmed in with the purple of the naked wintry beech woods. In the very centre of the arc of blue in front of her Pen-y-fal reared its strange peak, palely golden in the morning light. Peggy's heart was twisted with the sickening pang of loss. She wanted Johnny more than ever. She wanted him just at this moment. It was so beautiful and dear a vision, she longed to share the joy of it. She bit back her tears and turned to wheel over the bridge. On each side the water was shot with gold and blue; just beyond, the oak glades of Treowen climbed, richly bronze; the bracken was rust-flame underneath. The

grey pile of the house took a gleam of yellow sunshine on its eastern gabled façade. From a single chimney out of the many stacks floated a sinuous ribbon of pale grey smoke.

"I'll never rest," said Peggy to herself, "till every hearth in the house has its fire." And with the thought came the knowledge of what she meant to do. It was quite certain now. David must marry Vivianne.

She was busy peopling the old solitary house as she drove up the sodden avenue : Vivianne happy and safe ; David with loving content in those hungry eyes ; darling little red-haired children sprawling about. Busy servants, the sound of many feet, of laughter, of cheerful voices ; flowers gay once more in the neglected garden, the old stone vases blossoming ; the fountains playing. . . . Treowen alive and awake, holding the future in its embrace !

She pulled up her car at the wicket-gate, and pursued her way on foot. No one had swept the fallen leaves, no hand had cleared the encroaching grass from the drive. She emerged upon the terrace ; the sodden heads of two or three roses still clung to the wild, unpruned growth that stretched its thorny branches outwards over the terraced wall, and inwards toward the house.

Nature is all very well where the hand of man has never attempted to guide her ; but when she reasserts her sway over human effort the result is melancholy. Peggy thought she had never realised the true desolation of this place before. She halted a moment involuntarily. The silence, emphasised only by the lazy caws of a couple of flying rooks and the rushing of the winds through the woods below, seemed to invade her soul like a flood. It was the silence, not of the wild heart of peace, but a silence of death where there should be life ; a stillness that might be compared to the drawing down of blinds in the house of bereavement.

The door of the stone porch was ajar and, musing, she went in. The passage was empty, but wet flags and an abandoned bucket and brush showed that Madlen had been interrupted in her early scrubbing.

Peggy was glad not to have to stop and explain her presence. She crossed the stone hall, each step awaking echoes that sounded as if the very emptiness cried out, and was almost frightened to open the door of the oak parlour; she had come upon an errand so strange, so wild and difficult that her heart wellnigh failed her. As she hesitated, the sound of a child's crooning laughter fell upon her ear. From amazement she struck upon remembrance—Boulotte, of course! She walked in then, a brave smile upon her lips.

David was sitting, turned away from the breakfast-table, in the big carved, high-backed chair. At his feet Boulotte, with her tight Dutch cap and her long blue gown, was rolling about on the rug, her fat hands buried in the fur. She was bubbling with amusement after her fashion. The man was contemplating her gravely. He did not turn his head as the door opened, but said:

"She is quite good, Nanny; you can leave us a little while longer."

Peggy advanced. David looked round quickly at the sound of the light tread.

"Peggy, is that you so early? Do you know, I thought you were Nanny!—But no foot at Treowen steps like that. You see my new Red Cross nurse?"

It was the first time since the war she had seen that good smile.

"I'm jealous," said Peggy.

"Have you had breakfast?" David half rose.

"Oh, yes, thanks; at Mrs. Jones—Gracious to Goodness, as my Johnny used to call her." Peggy winked away the tear that had gathered. "I wanted to be a

Red Cross nurse, you know, straight off, but mother would not hear of it. What's that you say?"

"I said you're early afield."

"Had to be. David, something dreadful's happened—Vivianne's left Penarth."

The man turned so white that she stopped and stared.

"Do you mean she has gone away?" he asked hoarsely, and then added, "Lost?"

"No, oh no! I've left her at Mrs. Jones's. David, mother's been—I don't know why—horrible. She wanted to get her away—to shut her up in a convent. It bored her, I think, to see anything so sad. You know what mother is when she is bored. She and those horrid little Belgian women started to make arrangements without telling us a word—I mean me and Vivianne—and then poor father blurted it all out last night. Oh, you can't think how dreadful it was—how cruel it seemed! Vivianne hadn't guessed even—father thought it was all settled. Then Vivianne got up with a smile and went out of the room and locked herself up, and wouldn't let even me in; and I was so frightened I went and listened at the door in the night—and oh, David, David, dear, she was sobbing so—so—I never can tell you how."

The child on the floor rolled into a sitting posture and stayed its chuckling self-commune to stare with awed, inquisitive eyes at Peggy's face. David, clutching the arm of his chair with his one sound hand, sat very still, his eyes cast down.

"It's not as if she were like other people," lamented Peggy. "She's had such sorrow—and she minds things so dreadfully! She could hardly bear it as it was, having to take everything from other people, and then to find it was even given unwillingly! I never can forgive mother! David, she was going away, going

with hardly any money, she did not know where herself.—What did you say?"

David had said nothing, but Peggy broke off, disconcerted, feeling as if she had been passionately interrupted.

"You found her as she was going away?" he questioned, in a singularly contained voice, at last.

"Yes; I found her in the dawn. I had not slept either. She would not even take a cup of tea. She couldn't, she said; never in our house again. I brought her to Jonesie's cottage. I drove her myself, in the little car, you know. I made her eat there. I left her asleep before the fire and came to you."

"Wait a minute," said David.

He leaned forward, propped on his elbow, shading his eyes with his hand. Last night! . . . It was last night she had come to him in his dreams: he had held her in his arms, while joy and pain stabbed him to the soul. . . . And all the while she had been lying awake, in sorrow, sobbing—"Oh, I cannot tell you how!" Peggy had said. . . . Why was it she had come to him—was it for help? Had some mysterious bond been formed between them in that single meeting? All unawares, had some spirit part of her fled to him out of her extreme misery, knowing that it would find shelter? However it might be with her, that dream emanation of her had laid hold of him in singular fashion; since the instant he had awakened, it had seemed to him as if his whole being was impregnated with her as by a potent fragrance. He had been thinking of her, even as he sat gazing at the child when Peggy entered upon them.

He looked up sharply.

"Why do you tell me all this, Peggy?"

"Because—because——" Peggy stammered. There was a new fierce air about him; it discomfited her.

"You think I can help?"

"Yes, I do."

"How?"

Peggy had never lacked boldness; but, had she been the most timid creature in the world, David's eyes would have drawn the answer from her.

"I think you can marry her."

There came a silence that screamed at Peggy. Her heart had started beating so violently she could hardly breathe.

Boulotte suddenly began to whimper, and Peggy, glad to hide her confusion, stooped down and picked the child up. Still David did not speak. Stealing a glance at him, Peggy saw he was once more shading his eyes with his hand.

"I'm sure you must think me mad," cried the girl, quaveringly, "but oh, if you knew! There isn't anywhere she can go—she hasn't anyone; she's quite, quite alone. And she is so strange and beautiful—and forlorn; so different from everybody. I can't think, I can't imagine——" Her voice trailed off. She pressed her face against Boulotte's warm, white-capped head—it was quite absurd how often she felt inclined to cry lately.

"I wouldn't dare," said David under his breath. "It would seem like insulting her in her misfortune."

Clutching the child, Peggy, her pleading eyes on his troubled face, cried eagerly:

"No, no; how can you think that? Home and peace and safety, and someone to care for her."

David drew a long breath. There came a weighty pause then. She had a swift intuition of something almost unbelievable, the possibility of which, even in her most sanguine planning, had not dawned upon her. She was here to implore him to come to the aid of a most pitiable and forlorn creature whom no one else could help. David had always been ready to sacrifice

himself for others. It was really as an act of further self-abnegation on his part that she regarded the transaction, though out of her sublime ignorance of life she had incidentally built projects as fragile and unstable as a child's house of cards of the ultimate joys and blessings which marriage was to bring to the lonely man.

"Oh, David," she cried, panting, "you do care!" He raised his bent head and she saw a deep colour rush violently up to his pale face. Her own cheeks burned. "Oh, I beg your pardon!" she cried, and turned away.

She had never blushed or had the faintest thought of shyness in her own happy play at love—that delicate comedy which had ended in such deep-hearted tragedy. But what she now saw in David's face gave her an insight into the trouble and turmoil of a man's passion—the difficult, profoundly disturbing ardours of a virile nature which love has taken by storm. Vaguely she perceived feelings beyond her comprehension, and she was seized by an overpowering sense of intrusion.

He was the first to speak again:

"How do you wish me to act?"

"Oh, David, I have said——"

She could not continue; a faint smile flickered on his lips.

"My dear child, even if—well, people can't marry from one day to another like that."

"Why not?"—The words leaped from her on the pulse of eagerness. She heard him gasp, like one caught by the dash of a wave. "It's quite different now," she went on. "Ever so many people I know have been married like that since the war. People who hadn't even thought of being engaged before, some of them. It's just because one hasn't time to make a fuss about things—things that don't matter now. If one cares at all one cares desperately. If I'd known Johnny

was going out I'd have married him. I always meant to. And that's why I think"—her voice sank and she half whispered behind Boulotte's head—"I know he thought it best for me—my darling dead; and it's just the one thing I can't get over—not to be at least his widow!"

David rose and went to the window; he could not think of Peggy and Johnny now. Her words struck him, but only as fuel to his fire. Not to have followed the call of her heart was the one thing Peggy could not get over—why should he resist the call of his?

Vivianne, "beautiful, strange and forlorn," had already claimed him, mysteriously, before Peggy had come with her singular appeal. She needed him. Yet there was no need for him to find reasons for his passion; for with him it was already past reasons. He had lived apart all his youth and manhood till this hour. His glance had never feasted upon woman's beauty, his pulses had never quickened to woman's nearness—never, until one had sought him in his dream: Vivianne, who had called him through sleep to love. If the words he had just heard were not dream, too, he could make of the dream reality. It came upon him, almost to faintness. . . . His pale, sorrowing, silent lady—she might look up and smile at him with trust in her eyes! Passionately his soul folded itself about the thought of her. "Home and peace and safety, and someone to care for her." All this was his to give; would he not give it?

Boulotte, solid little bit of jollity as she was, began to find her entertainment poor. She struggled to get down from Peggy's knees, and gave a lusty shout at being restrained. The girl rolled her off her lap.

"Shall I take her to Nanny?" she asked.

David's face softened, even in the midst of his own preoccupation, as he looked down at the waif.

"She likes being here," he said. Then he came forward and said abruptly: "I'm a pretty figure for a bridegroom. Heaven knows if I shall ever use this arm again!"

Peggy clasped her hands.

"Oh, don't you see—don't you see, that's just what makes it easy? You want help, too. She won't be taking everything. She will feel you want her."

"What shall I do?" He moved slightly away, his words came humbly.—Peggy felt as if she were years older than this wounded man with the grey hair and the innocent heart, so much more worldly-wise and practical.—"Would she see me? Shall I go to her?"

"I think I'd better bring her here; you couldn't speak in Jonesie's cottage with the little walls on the top of you, and the dear old thing running in and out with her 'Gracious to goodness.' David, I'll bring her to-day, and you can speak to her here, in Treowen, the place that may be her home. Beloved Treowen! It's so sad now—and so empty and longing somehow, and so wonderful. There never was a place like it to me. You and Treowen together! Dear David, I'll bring her at tea-time, and I'll go away and leave you and——"

He gave a laugh, vibrating with contained emotion, flung himself into his chair again, and with that gesture she knew now as significant put up his left hand to conceal his face.

"I don't know which is the madder, you or I, Peggy," he said.

"Never mind. I'm off now," said Peggy.

CHAPTER X

First Steps in the Scheme

LADY CELIA walked into the smaller drawing-room, gave a vague smile in the direction of the Belgian ladies, sat down and took up her knitting. The two, who had broken off an eager conversation with the embarrassed abruptness of the interrupted, smiled back enthusiastically :

"I was just saying, dear Lady Morgan," exclaimed Madame Hollebeke, "how charming your chrysanthemums are."

"Yes, really," corroborated the Comtesse, "we have rarely seen any more beautiful."

"We die of envy to visit your greenhouses again," began the Baronne.

"Ah, there is so much to see here that is magnificent," sighed the other. And, having thus, they deemed, sufficiently removed any impression of unfavourable secret conference, they allowed themselves to relapse into silence, while Lady Celia, still with her fixed smile and discontented eyes, stared past them out of the window. Luncheon might be announced any moment. The Baronne looked surreptitiously at her watch; she was hungry.

"And our dear little Miss Peggy," insinuated Madame de Tirlemont presently in a detached manner, "has she returned safely?"

Lady Celia brought her gaze very slowly back from the window to the speaker's face, then she began to knit.

"No; she's not back yet."

"*Mon Dieu!* and are you not anxious?"

"Not at all," said Lady Celia.

"And Vivianne," exclaimed Madame de Tirlemont, "she, too, is still out, then?"

"I suppose so."

The Belgian ladies exchanged glances of meaning.

"But really, do you know, this becomes disquieting. God knows what has happened to them, these children. My maid tells me it was before the day that they departed, and after the—the scene of last night, too. It makes one fear, I know not what."

"Two young girls like that, alone!" Madame Hollebeke's tone waxed tragic.

"Oh, Peggy often goes away by herself."

"And to think that it is in an auto! Accidents so easily happen in autos. Not even a chauffeur, I understand?"

"Peggy drives very well."

"Oh, Lady Morgan, is it possible you are not anxious? Would it not be well to send to the research?"

"I shouldn't dream of such a thing," drawled Lady Celia.

As a matter of fact, she had dispatched the car in one direction and a couple of grooms on horseback in others. She was quite prepared, when the chauffeur should return from Gwent-Town, to be informed that the young ladies—wicked little fools, she characterised them in her own mind—had taken train for London. In which case there would be nothing for it but telephones and telegrams, and a tiresome journey in pursuit for herself.

The gong sounded, and the two small girls that belonged to Madame de Tirlemont—dark, long-haired, long-legged children—came demurely in with their

governess, followed by Madame Hollebeke's round-faced little boy in a tight plaid tunic.

"I am seriously alarmed," said the Baronne, rising, however, with alacrity.

Even as she spoke, Peggy, still in her furs, swung alertly into the room.

"Oh, here you are, dawlin'," said Lady Celia composedly. She stuck her knitting needles carefully into the ball and rose. "Let's go in to lunch."

"Very sorry, mother, dear, I haven't a moment. I can't lunch. I just wanted to tell you——"

"And Vivianne?"

"Where is Vivianne?" the sisters cried, their eyes gleaming with curiosity.

"Is Vivianne lost, mamma?" cried the little boy shrilly.

"Baby is so stupid," said the elder of the little girls in superior tones. "He's been crying all the morning because one has told him Vivianne must be lost."

"Well, and where is Vivianne?" asked Lady Celia without an inflection in her voice.

Peggy stood with her hands thrust deep in her pockets. Her fur cap was tilted on one side; she looked rakish, rather pale, determined, and extraordinarily pretty, her mother thought.

Lady Celia smiled involuntarily and proceeded without waiting for an answer: "Do let us have our lunch." Of all things, she wished just now to avoid a discussion.

"Vivianne isn't here; she's with old Mrs. Jones—Jonesie, you know, mother. I took her there. She's not coming back here any more; and please, mother, I'm going to stay there, too, to be with her."

"Peggy!——"

Lady Celia was really startled at last.

"*Ah mais——*" Madame de Tirlemont began and stopped.

The small Tirlemonts, who spoke English from nursery days, opened wide eyes, scenting naughtiness. Their governess, who spoke nothing but French, drooped her patient, long-nosed visage and yearned for the cutlets.

"Vivianne couldn't come back, you know," went on Peggy. She spoke with great deliberation. "I have told her I will not leave her. I must stay with her."

"Indeed"—the mother had now glided from amazement into a mild, plaintive sarcasm—"and how long do you intend to live at Mrs. Jones's, may I inquire?"

Peggy hesitated. Carnation colours flamed in her cheeks, but her voice remained firm.

"I don't quite yet know, mother."

"*C'est que je meurs de faim,*" whispered the Comtesse to the Baronne.

"Peggy, dawlin', don't talk nonsense. Come in to lunch, and we'll go and fetch that ridiculous child back home afterwards."

"No, mother."

"Do you say 'No' to me, Peggy?"

"Yes, mother."

"*Aïe, aïe!*" groaned Madame Hollebeke under her breath.

"Mademoiselle," said Madame de Tirlemont severely in French, "do me the pleasure to take the children into the hall and wait there."

Lady Celia rolled her meditative golden gaze towards the careful mother, and then upon the little procession till the door closed behind it. After which she once more fixed her eyes upon Peggy. For the first time she was brought up by a will stronger than her own, and—irony of fate!—that will was her daughter's.

What can the modern parent do to constrain the independent child? The days of supreme authority

are gone by. Lady Celia could not have Peggy carried to her room and locked up; and short of that nothing could avail. She certainly was not going to condescend to wrangle before her guests.

"I don't know what fawther will say," she remarked at last.

"I'll explain everything to father myself," said Peggy with dignity. Then she gave a sudden giggle. "Good-bye, mother, I must go. I have to see that Julie puts a few things in a hold-all for me, and I want to get back for Jonesie's dinner. She's got toad-in-the-hole." Madame de Tirlemont gave an ejaculation, and the girl laughed outright. "You can explain what it is when I'm gone. It was smelling jolly good."

She lifted her fresh face, and rather to her surprise her mother kissed her without another word.

"Au revoir, madame," said Peggy then, and shook hands prettily with the astounded Belgian ladies. "Au revoir, I shall take care of Vivianne."

The great mahogany door clapped behind her disappearing figure.

"God of Heaven!" exclaimed Madame Hollebeke, clasping her hands, "I blame myself—we blame ourselves. It is all because of that unhappy Vivianne!"

"Dear Lady Morgan," interpolated Madame de Tirlemont in an agonised voice, "do not hold us responsible for this misfortune."

"Ah, she will come back to her senses pretty soon, *allez*. She has a good little heart, that delicious Peggy. She will not vex her adored mamma."

The Baronne was anxious about the possible results of this development of affairs, and spoke with genuine emotion. Lady Celia looked round upon them as if they had escaped her memory and she had just become aware again of their existence.

"Peggy has always the most splendid ideas. I don't

think anyone could have thought of anythin' more suitable for a few days," she proclaimed in her languid way. "Hadn't we better go in to lunch?"

She was smiling once more as she followed her astounded visitors. She had not heard her child laugh like that since poor Johnny's death.

CHAPTER XI

A New Fragrance in the Old Home

DAVID continued to tell himself he was mad; that Peggy was a dear child; that, most certainly, whatever the future might hold, it was beyond the bounds of possibility to say one word to Mademoiselle de Flesselles of their fantastic project to-day, even if the proposed visit should take place.

Nevertheless, he informed a grumbling Nanny that she was to exert her energies in the direction of tea to the utmost resources of the house. Honey and pears he himself suggested, and her scones, and Madlen might lay out the old Spode service and——

"Indeed, yes, yes," interrupted Nanny, flattening her stiff apron with an angry shaking gesture.—She was likely, indeed, to entrust that girl with the grand china! And the master talked as if one had twenty hands, and Madlen with as much as she could do to look after Bullet, whatever . . .

"Bring Boulotte up to me, then."

"And indeed," cried old Nanny, her ill-humour flying at a tangent, "if it's the young foreign lady they've got at Penarth that's coming here again with Miss Peggy, she's not such good company for her, to my mind, sir, and I wouldn't be advising you to have little Bullet in the room with her, whatever, seeing the way she went by the child without so much as a look, as if she hadn't been taken in out of charity herself!"

"Nanny!——"

The old servant looked swiftly up, then down again; and the smoothing hands gave a furious jerk.

"It's for the young lady I'm to get out the best china, whatever, sir?"

"If you please, Nanny, and the best that Treowen can give."

Mrs. Price wrung her apron together, flung a glance, half scared, half indignant at her master and went away, muttering to herself. David stood by the hearth, staring after her, with dilated nostrils. A minute ago he had been endeavouring to reason himself out of the folly born of a wild dream; now, the first opposition had revealed to himself the existence within him of a set resolve. There was going to be trouble with Nanny, that was evident. Well, it must be faced. . . . *As if she had not been taken in out of charity herself*—there was the rub, of course: to have to do service for someone who could no longer command it. What a base world it was . . . even old Nanny! What hope, indeed, was there for the poor child with her strange beauty and her pride, cast adrift upon its mercies?

He began to busy himself about the room, ordering it to the best of his ability with his single available arm. But he was soon forced to sit down, exhausted and in pain. Wiping the perspiration from his forehead, he looked forlornly and discontentedly round. The place, all at once, had a desolate air to his eyes. Nanny must be getting too old, and Madlen was too young and careless. It had never struck him before how much required seeing to. The window-seat was not dusted; the curtains were hanging off the rings in two or three places. He was shocked, too, to notice how faded the red velvet of these curtains had become in the course of years—almost pale violet in patches. The hand of a mistress, the eye of a mistress . . . they were sadly wanted at Treowen. . . . He hoped the doctor

would not fail to come this morning. His arm had begun to hurt him very much—he must have wrenched it just now, shifting the table. If, indeed, Peggy's impossible scheme came off to-day, if he could venture upon a word of his thoughts to Vivianne, he would like to be fairly easy, not to look too much of a cripple. Whatever happened, he trusted the doctor would not delay till the afternoon, as had been the case once or twice of late—this would be embarrassing, humiliating. . . .

The morning passed, however; the doctor did not come. The pain in his arm increased.

Peggy arrived, chattering and laughing in a way that reminded David of those bright days before the war. He did not notice, manlike, that the very energy of the girl's cheerfulness sprang from a valiant effort. She came in, hunting Boulotte before her, to the ecstatic joy of that small person. Vivianne, following, had a faint smile upon her lips. For the first time David saw her smile. It was not radiant, hopeful, as in his dream; it was fatigued in its sweetness, inexpressibly pathetic, he thought.

She did not draw her hand from his, but let him lead her to the big chair near the hearth. It seemed to him as if she had reached a point where she could struggle no more, and that the sense of relaxation had brought a kind of serenity with it.

"Oh!" cried Miss Morgan excitedly, "what an adorable tea-table! Such cups—Spode! I've never seen yellow Spode before. *Non*, Boulotte! *C'est pas pour* Boulotte.—David, may she have a pear? *Tiens*, Boulotte, *la belle poire!* Oh, David, I've never had pears for tea before. It's just too—have you got the kettle there? No? I'll go and get it. I say, Nanny's just a leetle, leetle—shall we mention the word?—cross. She

called me Miss Morgan, and said the doctor might come at any moment. You do look rather pale, David. I hope there's nothing wrong."

Not at all. Not in the least, David assured her. He was so well, on the contrary, that the doctor did not mind now how late he came.

"Well, I'm off for the kettle."

She was half-way to the door when David arrested her with a curious look.

"Don't go—yet."

Peggy reddened and looked confused, and fell upon Boulotte, exclaiming over the result of pear juice, and tried to wipe her clean with her handkerchief. Boulotte wriggled from her grasp and landed up against Vivianne's feet, which she presently began to examine with much interest and then to stroke.

A very solemn Nanny, followed by Madlen—purple with holding her breath after some mysterious code of etiquette—in charge of a tray of hot cakes entered the room. Under cover of the cheerful riot Peggy now made over to the tea-table; David lost himself in the contemplation of the picture by his hearth.

Vivianne, her slender body relaxed in the high-backed arm-chair, each pale hand drooping over the carved lion's head, had more than ever an air apart. The two plaits of deep red hair fell across her shoulders, her narrow, delicate face in between, and the long throat showed ivory pale with a chiselled purity of line. Her shadowed eyelids were cast down, the faint smile still hovered on her lips. She seemed to be contemplating the child at her feet gently, yet as from an infinite distance. David was minded of some sculptured saint in her shrine, some alabaster lady prone upon her tomb. He felt her extraordinarily remote from his own world, even from his century; the faint, strange fragrance which hung about her placed her still more

elusively away in an atmosphere of her own. Born of a race, bred in a creed and traditions, moved by thoughts and feelings alien to his own as she was, there was no single link between them—save that of misfortune. The workings of her mind were as inscrutable to him as the movements of her heart. Yet, mystery of man's nature, he loved her!

As he stood, silently encompassing her with his eyes, he determined to have her for his wife, or never anyone. This man of the Welsh hills, who, save for three fantastic, bloodstained battle weeks, had known no land but his own; whose outlook was profoundly insular; whose energies had been centred in the elementary interests of existence, and this girl of mixed patrician blood; this exile with her singular, cruel story, who had come like the maiden of far legend, wandering from one day to another, into his house, silent, stricken, scornful and aloof—it was surely a strange conjunction!

He knew it was madness, but he felt it was fate.

The child at Vivianne's feet climbed till the fat hands clung to her knees; and, staring up at the pale face, began to murmur, in a chuckling, cooing voice:

"La belle dame—oh, la belle dame!"

Vivianne neither moved nor spoke. David longed, with an unreasonable superstitious desire, that she would stoop and take the little creature into her arms. But, as if she had been, indeed, the sculptured saint of his fancy, she seemed neither to hear nor feel, but continued looking down, the faint smile unchanging on her lips. He had a sinking of the heart. Absurd as it was, he was saying to himself: This is an augury. This is how it will be with me and my love.

Peggy's high, clear voice interrupted the disturbing self-colloquy:

"Now, David, you must sit down. There's not the least use trying to do the polite with one left arm. And it's woman's privilege to minister to the wounded. Vivianne, if you let the brat crawl all over you like that she'll have you a perfect mess with pear juice. *Tiens, Boulotte, attrape!*"

She threw a sweet cake to distract the small Walloon from her inconvenient attitude of adoration. Boulotte made a dart for the dainty, and snatched it with a chuckle of such unctuous content that Peggy called out in amusement.

Vivianne suddenly broke into laughter, too. Then it was to David as if the sun had shone into his dim, shadowy room. It had scarcely seemed to him as if she could laugh. Colour and life bloomed in her face with that flash of innocent mirth. David forgot the suffering in his arm, or, rather, it was, as in his dream, as if pain were only stimulant to joy.

The meal, begun upon this note of cheerfulness, went on in the gathering silence. Boulotte was exclusively engaged upon her cake. It seemed more natural for Vivianne to hold her peace than to speak; a look, an upward quiver of the lip, a gesture of slow acceptance from the pale hand: where she was concerned it was answer enough. David was away in his dream. There is that stage when a lover's absorption makes him blind and deaf and dumb to all about him except the one being. Nanny and her satellite had long departed. They had lit the candles in the old tarnished silver candelabra, placed a reading-lamp on a small table at David's elbow, and drawn the heavy velvet curtains. The lofty panelled room might be said to be less illuminated than revealed in shade. Round the hearth the circle was caught in the glow, and here and there gleams of polished oak gave back the crocus candle flames that bowed and winked occasionally as little draughts flitted through.

Peggy had essayed, single-voiced, to keep the talk going, but soon gave in. She sat, feeling all kinds of strange presences about her—visions past and present; hopes and fears; her own ever-abiding sorrow; David and Vivianne and the future of Treowen; the spirit of Treowen itself, that old, old ghost that had many faces to her, and yet how distinct a personality! It dwelt specially here in this room; it spoke from the oak on the walls, from those cut-velvet curtains which had been new in the days of Charles II., with their wonderful shades of faded crimson like the lees of precious wine;—could Peggy but have known of the sacrilegious thought which David had entertained towards them that very day!—from the faces of long dead Owens out of the tarnished gold frames; from the old chairs that had once borne their weight; from the hearth where they had warmed themselves and gathered close.

Her own ghost was here, too: the poor little gay ghost of Johnny's sweetheart. Peggy felt as if it were a being distinct from herself and was dreadfully sorry for it, as for a child stricken in its play. But as she found her thoughts drifting in this direction, the girl jumped to her feet. She had to be brave and strong. It would never do to give in to self-condolence just when she had such important work on hand for others; and—she had been almost forgetting it!—David must be left alone with Vivianne.

Fortunately, the excuse was ready. She had herself provided it in the stout little person of Boulotte.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, "Nanny will be fit to murder me for keeping the child from her proper tea. Please, David, let me take her down; don't ring, the dear old thing is cross enough already. 'Indeed, yes, yes!' Oh, how darling my Johnny used to be with his Welsh!" She could not help the break in her voice. David's love affair had brought her

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own poor story too vividly close to her. "*Allons, allons, Boulotte!*" She tried to laugh. "I believe she'd roll any way, whichever side one put her. I shan't be long, Vivianne."

She was near tears, in spite of her valiant laughter, as she bundled the child out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

Abrupt Wooings

AT first David felt as if he would hate to disturb the silence between him and Vivianne. There she sat, at his hearth, in the glow of his fire, his unspoken passion about her : it was so exquisite a moment that he feared to break the spell. But urgencies drove him. She was in perilous need, in a precarious, abnormal situation ; from one day to another she might slip out of his life as she had entered it, leaving in him an undying regret and an immeasurable remorse. For where would she go, poor child ? . . . And once she was lost, who might find her ? He got up and came a step or two nearer, and stood looking down at her. Then he began abruptly :

"You have left Penarth?"

She glanced up at him fugitively and drew into herself.

"Yes."

The music that his ear hungered for in her voice was mute.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"You do not think of going away from here, I hope?"

He was himself speaking with great difficulty; feeling intolerably awkward and confused by the knowledge of the ardours possessing him in secret. His arm was throbbing—there was perhaps fever in his blood as well as in his mind. Once more she lifted her gaze upon

him. The look stabbed him. These were the eyes of one who anticipates the blows of fate.

"I cannot well stay where I am," she answered him after a pause. He felt she had hesitated whether she should answer at all.

"No, you cannot do that. But if you go, where will you go?"

"I do not know."

"You have no friends—except here?"

She questioned him with that darkling gaze again.

"Peggy is kind," she said at last. In the firelight her face showed set and cold, as it was the first time he had seen her. The soft lips took a bitter curve. "But kindness is——" She broke off.

He was not intuitive. Nevertheless, he understood.

"Kindness is not enough, you mean," he said, and his voice shook. He wanted to approach her very gently. What he hoped to say to her to-day must be so delicately spoken and with such infinite precaution, lest any fibre of her wounded pride should shrink from the touch. But unknown forces were pushing him, passion opened before him like a chasm of glorious fire; he found himself on the very edge of it. He clutched the stone of the chimney hood to steady himself. As if some apprehension of the storm within him had fallen upon her, she drew back and rose.

"Do not go!" he cried hoarsely.

"But, Peggy——"

"Peggy does not want you. I do."

She had been shrinking away, not so much in fear as in distaste, but at these words she came a step nearer with a movement of anger.

"You?"

"Yes, I—I. I know you will think me mad; I think I am mad myself. And yet, after all, why? I have no one, you have no one. Look about you, here.

Do you not see—oh, do you not see how my loneliness calls out for you?"

His eyes were desperately reading her face. He saw how it became dyed with crimson, and then grew white; how, at one moment, her strange eyes menaced him, how, the next, they were cast down; how brooding thought succeeded the flash of anger. His heart sprang with an intolerable spasm of hope. He did not dare add another word, nor even stir, lest, scared like a shy bird, she should be gone from him in a fluttering beat of wings. It was she who spoke:

"Why do you say these things to me? I do not know you at all."

The cry that rose to his lips was: "Because I love you, because you have come into my life and taken possession of it, because I have held you in my arms in a dream." He forced it back, not so much because of any reasoned perception that the sudden revealing of his passion would be fatal to his hopes, but because of his deep respect, his trembling worship of her helpless girlhood.

"I venture to speak to you," he said at last, with a certain dignified clearness, "because you are alone in the world and so am I, and the times are so strange and quick—it is not possible to follow old ways—and I want you to believe, to understand, that though you know me so little you can trust me. If you would consent to become my wife, to make Treowen your home, I think you would not regret it. You can trust me."

He had been looking away, but at the conclusion of his words, he turned and fixed full upon her his honest, sad, ardent eyes. It was impossible for anyone to meet that gaze without feeling that indeed here was a man who *could* be trusted.

Vivianne stood rapt in profound reflection. Her

glance passed beyond him, and seemed to be fixing some other presence. A curious expression, triumphant, a little cruel, passed across her face flittingly, like the shadow of a driven cloud. Then, with a slight gesture, she turned to him.

"I don't know what to think," she said, like a child.

"Don't think," said David, in a tone so low that it was hardly above a whisper, "don't think; trust me."

Though there was a great stillness about them which their own voices hardly disturbed, the clamour of their thoughts, the momentousness of the point at issue between them, so absorbed their attention, that sounds of commotion outside the room passed unnoticed: the throbbing of a car, the jangle of the ancient door-bell, voices echoing in the hall, and footsteps on the stairs.

Peggy pushed open the door and looked in.

"Oh, Davy, dear, it's the doctor!"

David came back from tremendous distances, out of a strange world of torture and exultation, and realised that there was a searing pain in his arm.

"I'm so sorry," he said, turning to Vivianne with the formal courtesy that his solitary life had developed.

"It is time for us to go, anyhow," said the girl.

Peggy looked from one to the other. The atmosphere was charged with emotion she felt; and yet she could not feel sure that things were not going badly. David's face was tired and lined, and Vivianne had an air of composed detachment for which she could have shaken her.

"I'm certainly not going," she proclaimed. "I want to know what the doctor says. You look quite ill, David."

He admitted, with a faint smile, that his hurt was a little troubling to-night, cast a wistful glance at Vivianne, and without any further word went out of the room.

"I'm certainly not going away," repeated Peggy, with an indignant look.

The other made no reply; but, returning slowly to the arm-chair by the fire, sat down and fell into a muse, her eyes fixed on the leaping flames. Peggy was on tenterhooks; she wanted to ask questions, to know everything at once. But she knew enough of Vivianne by this time to understand how fatal it would be to betray any knowledge of David's feelings. Indifferently, she said:

"I hope you don't mind staying on? I'm really anxious."

"It does not matter at all to me," answered her companion without moving.

Peggy bit her thumb-nail in exasperation. She was not much advanced, at this rate. She moved to the fire, went to the door, opened it and listened, and came back to Vivianne.

"I feel oddly nervous," she said. "I asked the doctor how David was, and he said: 'Very nicely, thank you, indeed, Miss Morgan!' as if it was his own silly arm I was asking about. Of all things in the world, I hate a fool!"

Then she gave a jump and a little scream, for there was a knock at the door; but it was only old Nanny, smoothing her apron in a tremendous state of dudgeon and flutter.

"And indeed I hope you'll forgive me for troubling you, Miss Morgan. Indeed, it's but a trouble I am to everyone in these days, whatever. There's no pleasing the doctor, this evening. What between the water not being to his liking—and indeed at my time of life I ought to know when a kettle has boiled, whatever—and the master's arm, no wonder it's got the inflammation with the way it's been treated for him, poor gentleman! There, there, if they'd but put a bit of

ointment on to heal it! And it's my fault, it seems, at the end of it all! It's high time the poor old woman was in her grave, I'm thinking. I nursed a-many, sore and sick, before Dr. Evans was as much as thought of."

"Oh, Nanny, I am sorry! Isn't the arm so well?"

"How could it be well and it's scalded off him every day, you may say, Miss Peggy. Look at the hands on me? There's boiled for you! Dr. Evans to be telling me 'It's no use, my good woman, you can't help here!' Good woman!—at my time of life, too! 'Ask Miss Morgan,' he says, 'if she'd oblige me.'"

"I?" cried Peggy. She had wanted to be a Red Cross nurse so ardently; contemplating her broken life she had told herself time and again that only by devoting it to the service of those who, like her Johnny, had gone forth to suffer, could she find any real consolation. It had been the chief of her grievances against her mother that on this point she had been adamant; now it was surely the most vexatious freak of weak-mindedness that she should turn sick and trembling at the mere thought of looking on David's wound. How dreadful it would be if she were to faint, and drop the boiling water, or otherwise disgrace herself! She stood clenching her hands and setting her teeth, deaf to Nanny's further outpourings, when the doctor himself appeared. He came down the passage in a great hurry, hurled himself in through the open door, and pushed the old woman unceremoniously on one side.

"Miss Morgan, has she not told you? I'm sorry to trouble you, but I must have some help. I'm not at all satisfied with the state of Mr. Owen's wounds to-day. There's certainly been carelessness in the bandaging," he broke off. "What's the matter, Miss Morgan? I don't expect you to help me operate, you know. Ha! ha! it's a mere matter of washing and syringing. But

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I must have everything sterilised; boiling water, just that, and someone to hand me. Tut! tut!" He gave her a hard stare, clacked his tongue and snapped his fingers impatiently, and turned sharp on Nanny. "You've got a girl in the house with you, haven't you? Tell her to wash her hands and come up to me. And quick, too!"

The motionless figure by the fire stirred and rose. Vivianne stepped forward.

"I can help you," she said.

"You?" The doctor's small, angry eyes appraised searchingly.

"Yes. I know how to dress wounds."

"Do you?"

"Yes; at Ostend I had to help—everyone helped; there were so many."

"Come along, then."

Vivianne followed the little bustling man, rolling her thick plaits of hair out of the way as she went. The doctor instructed hurriedly as he clattered back along the uncarpeted boards of the passages.

"I expect you'll feel more comfortable now," said Dr. Evans, with professional benevolence, as he looked down at his patient.

David was sitting in the old tapestry arm-chair, his head flung back against the faded cushion, his eyes closed against the glare of the mercilessly unshaded lamp, his face very pale.

"Humph! a bit faint, I dare say," the doctor went on. "You've got a touch of fever again, you know. No wonder indeed with your arm in that state. I told you that old woman was no use. She's put a dirty bandage on. My dear Mr. Owen, I'm not blaming her. You can't expect one of her sort to do anything

else. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, Miss—Miss—" Packing his bag as he spoke, with characteristic impetuosity, he now paused to push the discarded bandages across the table towards Vivianne, who stood in her still way at the back of David's chair. As she did not fill the hiatus, Dr. Evans promptly compounded with: "Mademoiselle, I'm very much obliged, Mademoiselle, and I'd be still more so if you'd see all these sterilised yourself and ready by to-morrow. By the way, what about to-morrow? I'll be round the first thing; but I can't get you a nurse between this and then, Mr. Owen."

He paused, and once again invited response from his unknown helper. This time she gave it.

"I can come."

"Oh, indeed; I'd be very much obliged, I'm sure. But all the way from Penarth—you're there, aren't you? It will make an early start for you, I'm afraid."

"No, I'm quite close, here."

"Indeed."

"Yes, at a cottage. Mrs. Jones's cottage in the village."

The small, dark man, ready to snap his bag away, paused for an amazed stare. Here was a strange visitor for Mrs. Jones, a girl who held herself like a princess, spoke as if it were a condescension, and generally looked as if the earth was scarce good enough to walk on. He was the most intensely professional person that ever practised the healing art; nevertheless, he had not been able to avoid noticing the exquisite shape and whiteness of the hands which had moved so deftly under his instruction. . . . Sad thing, this war! To think of a girl like her driven to the shelter of an old dairywoman's roof. . . . He rather wondered at the Morgans. Well, well, it was no business of his.

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged," he repeated.

"What about nine o'clock in the morning—would that suit you? I could pick you up on my way."

"Thank you, but I will come with my friend, Miss Morgan."

"Our Miss Morgan, you mean?"

"We are together at Mrs. Jones," answered Vivianne, in the tone that puts a stop to investigation.

The doctor had not the time to ponder over the new problem, for David, who had already stirred uneasily as Vivianne first spoke, now made an effort to get up. The medical man interfered promptly.

"Now, now, now, Mr. Owen! Ha, giddy? I thought so. We'll be having you falling on that arm if you don't take care. Where's that old woman of yours? She'd better get you to bed straight off; I'll send her up to you. Good evening, Mr. Owen. Please remember that a man who has had four Maxim bullets in one arm has to take things carefully.—Are you coming down, Mademoiselle?"

"No, not yet," said David. Then he added, in a kind of whisper, turning his head to look up at her: "I must speak with you."

Dr. Evans passed his hand over his scrubby black beard, cast a whimsical glance from patient to nurse, looked at his watch, gave an ejaculation of dismay, and caught up his bag. Then, bowing hurriedly, he rushed out of the room, leaving the door open behind him.

Vivianne came round to the front of David's chair and stood before him. For a moment there was no sound in the room but his panting breath. At last he said:

"It's impossible! You cannot do this for me again."

"Why not?"

Once more there was a pause. David put his hand

to his eyes, but it trembled so helplessly that he let it fall. Then he said, speaking with difficulty :

"I know I am nothing but a wounded man to you, but I——" As he could get no farther, she prompted :

"You ?"

"I could not bear it—not again, unless——"

The long, long pause was weighted with meaning, with expectation.

Vivianne made a gesture at length, like one casting away a burden. She bent her head, and briefly :

"Have it so, then," she said.

"Vivianne !" He caught at the beautiful hand that had tended him, checked the passion of his first movement, and laid only a veneration touch upon her. "Don't play with me ! Do you mean it ?"

"Since I am wanted here."

She drew her hand from his, but the smile had come back to her lips. He saw it as through circles of fire. He gave a long sigh. She went round to the table and gathered the bandages together, dropped them into the basin and, lifting it under one arm, moved towards the door. He followed her with a yearning, feverish gaze ; he could not trust himself to utter another word. On the threshold she paused and looked back.

"I shall be here to-morrow morning. I hope you will sleep well. Good night !"

CHAPTER XIII

A Double-Edged Letter

THE attic room in Mrs. Jones's cottage, which she occasionally let in the summer season to anglers, or artists, or respectable young couples from Newport or Cardiff, was almost entirely filled up by a large four-poster—a relic of ancient family prosperity. Her great-grandmother had herself collected the goose-down that swelled the billowy feather-bed which was Mrs. Jones's pride. Round it short curtains of faded Indian chintz still hung, carefully mended, between the walnut posts. The rest of the room consisted chiefly of sloping ceiling, the wall space was inconspicuous; indeed, to obtain a view out of the little dormer window, it was almost necessary to kneel upon the boards. But the view was worth the trouble; for the grey and silver waters of the Usk raced within a stone's throw of the back garden, and, beyond, the fertile valley reached to the embrace of the hills.

It was a dark, cloud-covered night as the two girls came up the breakneck ladder stairs to seek their unusual quarters. There was no fireplace in the attic, and Mrs. Jones had taken the precaution of closing the casement with great care; though, as she had explained to her self-invited tenants: "You won't find the room cold, Miss Margaret, my dear, nor you, Miss, indeed, by reason of the kitchen chimney; and I've put two bottles in the bed, Miss Margaret—ginger-beer bottles, Miss Margaret, bach. Not the grand bags you're accustomed

to, whatever, but there's warm they'll be, and keep the heat in wonderful."

"Gracious to Goodness," cried Peggy, as she latched the matchwood door behind them, "there's stuffy we are, anyhow! Phew!" She put down the huge tin candlestick, proceeded to open the window, and remained sitting down on her heels, breathing in the cold pure air. "Ah! that's good!" she sighed.

The grave voice of the river poured into the room. Miss Morgan was in high spirits. In spite of the sorrow that had unnaturally stricken her youth, it was impossible for anyone still so much of a child not to be stimulated by the escapade into which she had plunged. The odd tiny room; the droll aspect of her luxurious quilted satin dressing-gown over the bristling horse-hair arm-chair, of her ivory hair-brushes spread out on the lopsided chest of drawers; the inviting curves of the feather bed; the single tallow candle flame leaping and flickering fantastically in the draught—it was all as good as a game to her—something delightfully outside real life.

Although her companion had been uncommunicative, Peggy had been able to form a shrewd guess that things were tending at least towards her wishes. She had not seen David again before leaving; but she could only congratulate herself on the result of her own unexpected fit of nerves, when Dr. Evans informed her, on his way out, that her friend, mademoiselle, was a capital nurse, that she had promised to return the next morning, and that he would ask for nothing better, indeed, to help Mr. Owen through.

Vivianne looked round the little room that amused Peggy so much, as if she saw no difference between it and the sumptuous bedchamber that had sheltered her at Penarth.

"I want to write a letter," she said abruptly. "Is that your writing-case? May I use it?"

"A letter!" Peggy stared. She had never seen Vivianne put pen to paper in all the days they had been together. She knew indeed that the poor child had no one left whom she cared about, or who cared about her. Without appearing to notice her friend's surprise, Vivianne took up the case and sat down on the corner of her trunk, drawing the candlestick close to her hand.

Lady Celia had sent that trunk—a strategic move characteristic of her way of dealing with a difficult situation—and great had been the work of lugging it up the ladder stairs.

"You get into bed," said Vivianne, "and try to sleep. I don't know how long I'll be."

Peggy yawned and began making ready to obey. She was, now that she came to think of it, overpoweringly tired after so wakeful a night and so busy a day.

As she jumped into the feather bed she cried out at the curious sensation; laughed and declared it was horrible but rather nice, and that the ginger-beer bottle was boiling. Next she wondered how Mrs. Jones ever got out of her feather bed when once she had got into it.

"One seems to go down and down, Vivianne," she said. "I'm sure I shan't ever want to get up again."

Vivianne moved her gaze but not her mind towards the bed; her eyes remained fixed, staring. She had not written one word yet; of that Peggy was sure. The little matchmaker wondered again, and tried to imagine to whom the letter could possibly be written; but she was too sleepy to tackle any problem, and soon was dropping off into forgetfulness. Twice she woke up, under the sense of her unusual surroundings and the

fidgety expectation of Vivianne's getting in beside her; and each time she opened her eyes, blinking at the candle flame, there was the bent head over the blank sheet of paper. From profounder depths of sleep she was startled at last to find her friend standing by the bed; she sat straight up, with an odd sensation that she was wanted.

"What is it?" she cried.

"My letter is written." Peggy's eyes, very wide and bewildered in her tired face, questioned. Vivianne went on: "You remember the letter, don't you—his letter that I gave you to read? This is my answer to it."

"Oh, Vivianne!"

"You may read it if you like."

Peggy looked doubtfully at the envelope as it lay to her hand on the check quilt. But Vivianne, with great deliberation, took up the tin candlestick and held the light.

"Now you can see," she said.

Peggy obediently lifted the envelope.

PRINCE LADISLAS ORLENSKI,
Palazzo Goldoni,
Venice.

That was the address written on it. She was wide awake now; her fingers trembled as she drew out the sheet; she had not the vaguest idea of what she would find written thereon. It was in French, and very short.

"MY DEAR COUSIN LADISLAS,—Since you are kind enough to express some further interest in what concerns me, I write to inform you that I am about to marry. My future husband is Mr. Owen, of Treowen. He is of ancient family, and has an estate near where I am now living. He has returned wounded from

Belgium, where he has been fighting for my country. Our marriage will take place very shortly. I trust, my dear cousin, that you will find as much pleasure in my happiness as you had sympathy for my misfortune.

"Believe always in my good memories of you,
"VIVIANNE DE FLESSELLES."

"Oh, darling!" cried Peggy. Further she did not know what to say. The success of her own plan almost frightened her. How could she wish Vivianne joy over that letter, and all the bitterness she knew it was meant to carry?

Vivianne put down the candle and restored the sheet to its envelope, which she very delicately closed.

"You go to sleep again," she said. "I'm coming to bed at once. No, don't talk to me. It's all right; I just wanted you to know. I had rather you did not say anything. What is there to say? The past is past, the future no one can know."

But when in her turn Vivianne had climbed into the great feather bed, and the candle was blown out, and they lay side by side in the darkness, listening to the vast chant of the river, Peggy felt she could not bear the silence any more; she turned suddenly and flung her warm young arms round her friend.

"Oh, I do pray you'll be happy!—Oh, Vivianne! it's all I want now, that you should be happy, you and David, in my old Treowen. Oh, he is good, Vivianne! You will have to love him!"

"I don't know. I think love is dead."

"You'll be kind to him; he has been so unhappy."

"Ah! so have I; but that is dead, too."

"Oh, darling, I know, I know!"

Peggy hugged and kissed her with tears. And

then Vivianne suddenly broke and began to cry too, and for the first time kissed Peggy back as if her heart was in her kiss. And as she sobbed, she said :

“Three months ago my sister and I were like this, together, at Flesselles. Once I had a sister.”

Clasping each other, in the midst of their tears, they fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

Meeting the Inevitable Half-way

THE two Belgian ladies having gone up to London for the day, their hostess profited by their absence to pounce upon her neighbour, Lady Caerleon, and carry her off to lunch at Penarth. In pursuance of a certain settled plan, she had herself manœuvred and successfully encompassed these separate arrangements. Grace Caerleon, and through her, Lord Penpergan, the greatest gossip of the county, should be first made aware of this runaway whimsey of Peggy's through the medium of Peggy's mother; and from the point of view Peggy's mother had decided it should be regarded.

"You won't mind comin' with me to see my little girl, dawlin'? No, she's not here; that's the reason I wanted you. I'm quite alone. My poor Belgians have gone up to London; they're shoppin'. I told them it would be so dreadfully crowded later on. The children are gone too. Nice children, aren't they? I said to Madame de Tirlemont there wasn't a bit of good in tryin' to get them their clothes in Gwent-Town. No, dawlin', Peggy's not gone up with them. Haven't I told you? I want you to come with me to see her after lunch. You can't have been listenin'. Peggy's gone to Bwlchlin." Lady Caerleon lifted her long dark lashes to stare in mild surprise. "Yes, dawlin'. Poor little Peggy; she's a perfect angel! Do you remember that pale, silent girl—the other Belgian? You must

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remember her. She fainted the night you were playin' the piano."

"Indeed, yes. Unhappy child! Vivianne, I think they called her. Madame de Tirlemont told me appalling things! One's heart bleeds!" said Lady Caerleon musically.

She was plucking muscatel grapes with fastidious fingers. She was not really interested in Peggy, or the Belgians, or the fainting girl and what had happened to her just at this moment. She wanted to talk about her husband first—about his last letter to her, and how, thank God! fighting was slacking off a bit, and she felt she could almost draw a breath. She would have liked to flow placidly on, describing in minute detail all her emotions from the first moment of his departure till the present hour, with incidental commentaries on his gallantry and her determination to be worthy of him. But, as Lady Celia had the stronger will of the two, it was Lady Celia who spoke and her companion had to listen.

"Yes, one's heart bleeds; and the worst of it is one's so helpless. My dear, I was the first to see it. The poor girl has got into such a state of nerves! And no wonder! She simply couldn't bear the life with us, seein' so many people, havin' to come down to meals and meet strangers, and the little Belgians always laughin' and chatterin' and goin' on. They drive me wild sometimes. No wonder anyone so miserable as Vivianne was quite distraught. Well, dawlin', I saw it was killin' her. I thought of sendin' her to a nice quiet convent. But my little Peggy, she's got such a golden heart!" Lady Celia's eyes misted. "She would have it she must go away with Vivianne herself, just for a little bit. And, of course," said Lady Celia, rolling a candid amber gaze in a convincing manner, "I couldn't let Peggy go to a convent. Her fawther

would have a fit ! And I didn't like the child to be out of reach either. These days, dawlin', one doesn't feel as if one could bear it, does one ? Oh, dear, fancy my sayin' that to you ! " She leaned across the table, and pressed her guest's hand. Then she went on very quickly ; she must finish the tale before Grace Caerleon was launched :

"So I've let them go to dear old Mrs. Jones, at Bwlchlin, an old servant, you know. She's got a dawlin' little cottage. They're doin' the simple life. I think it's a splendid idea. They'll be only too glad to get back here in a week or so. I'm goin' to take Peggy a basketful of things. So you won't mind motorin' there, will you, dear ? You'll love old Mrs. Jones's cottage."

"I'm sure I shall," murmured the polite Grace, "and seein' Peggy, too. You will allow me to stop at the post office. I've a little packet to send to Caer—poor fellow !—just peppermint lozenges and cinnamon tabloids. Peppermints ! It just came to me like that—a kind of inspiration. Isn't it strange ? It seems it's the very thing they like. It warms them up, you know, in those dreadful trenches. And the cinnamon is the best remedy against germs."

Lady Celia did not now trouble to stem the tide of words. She had issued her own *communiqué*.

By the time they had finished their coffee, Lady Caerleon had also happily concluded the minute catalogue of the parçels she had sent to the front ever since Caerleon's departure. She was therefore amenable to the suggestion of an immediate start for Bwlchlin.

"I'm rather anxious," Lady Celia remarked, "not to be out too late these dark days."

What she was really anxious about was to fix upon the exact hour when the two girls were likely to be found. And the cottage dinner-time seemed to be the

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most opportune. Lady Celia knew very well that explanations are the worst of all remedies, that the only way to stop the spread of gossip is to provide an ocular demonstration to independent witnesses. Grace Caerleon was likely to be agreeably impressed by the little picture of Peggy's devotion to the unhappy exile, set as it was in the engaging surroundings of Mrs. Jones's cottage. It would provide a touching tale for Grace to melt over during the next few weeks, when everyone had heard about Lord Caerleon's last package of comforts—and Lord Penpergan would be much interested, and talk about it all round the county.

"It is so nice," said Lady Celia, as she settled herself comfortably amid the cushions of the big blue motor-car, "to be only two to drive about again!—Tell him to go to Mrs. Jones's cottage, Charles, at Bwlchlin. Oh, wait a moment! Have you got the hamper from the still-room? That's right. I'm in a hurry. You need never be afraid with me, Grace. Saunders drives most carefully. What was I sayin', dear? Oh, yes, of course, one is only too glad to do anythin' one can for the poor Belgians, but it is a little tryin' to be always three in the car. One of them has to sit back. It's so uncomfortable. Makes one feel as if one oughtn't to let them. And I do hate a pair of knees stickin' into me."

Lady Caerleon's grey eyes were dreamily fixed on the flying landscape.

"How cold it looks!" she murmured. "I wonder if they have the same kind of weather over there. Caer said not to send him a fur waistcoat. But I'm not sure. I beg your pardon, you were saying something?"

Lady Celia impatiently drew the wolf-skin rug higher on her knees. Grace was a dear thing, but just a little irritating.

"My Peggy has been such a little angel, goin'

every day to see the poor wounded." It was imperative to bring Grace's wandering mind to Peggy and her concerns.

The two tall ladies in their fur coats in Mrs. Jones's kitchen reminded Peggy of the days when she used to try and fit her large dolls into the rooms of her doll's house. Mrs. Jones, who really thought the world was becoming a very strange place, could scarcely speak for curtsies.

"Gracious to goodness, my lady; goodness to gracious, Lady Caerleon. If I'd known your ladyships were coming!"

She had only one arm-chair, poor old dame! It was a terrible problem in etiquette. Lady Celia instantly solved it by sweeping into the seat herself, ejaculating purringly: "How nice! how nice!" as the warmth of the hearth enveloped her.

She had caught Peggy by the waist, and was holding her close. Vivianne silently advanced her own chair for Lady Caerleon, and Mrs. Jones tried to re-establish equilibrium by polishing it with her apron.

"Oh, I hope," said Lady Caerleon in her tender voice, seizing the girl's hand, "I hope you are better since you came here! I think it is such a lovely idea to try and find peace in this simple home. I envy you. I'd like to hide myself away, too, in some secret place—yes, just like this—until my Caerleon comes back. My husband's at the front, you know."

Lady Celia bent forward.

"I think it's uncommonly snug here; I quite envy you children," she remarked. "I haven't been warm this month till now. I'm sure, Mrs. Jones"—she smiled radiantly at the ex-dairywoman, whose flushed countenance still betokened considerable agitation—"you're makin' them as comfortable as comfortable."

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Peggy, dawlin', I've brought you some cake and jam, dawlin', and a basket of grapes. You can take some of the grapes to the hospital, you and Vivianne. Have you been visitin' the wounded to-day? I told them to be sure the little car was brought over to you the first thing in the mornin'."

"I'm keeping it at the Treowen Arms, thank you, mother," said Peggy. She had a defiant, sparkling excitement in her whole air. "We haven't been to see any other wounded to-day, except David." She glanced at Vivianne across the kitchen: it was all filled with the glow from the hearth—even Vivianne's colourless face caught the reflection.

"David?" echoed Lady Celia. She, too, glanced at Vivianne, and then tried to scrutinise her daughter's countenance. "What were you doin' there?"

"David's arm got dreadfully bad, and Vivianne helped the doctor; she's quite a good nurse. She went back to help again this morning."

"Oh, did she?" said Lady Celia.

Peggy slipped off the arm of the chair. Her mother's tone and look made her temper flare. She had by no means forgiven the convent scheme.

"Yes, mother. And they're going to be married as soon as possible. Yes; I mean David and Vivianne. And I'm delighted."

For some inexplicable reason Lady Celia felt furious. Grace Caerleon covered the threatened awkwardness of the situation by a burst of feeling.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she said. Rising, she took Vivianne into her arms. "You two, drawn to each other by sorrow, as it were, finding your life happiness out of grief itself! Isn't it wonderful! Isn't it God's good way! That night you fainted, I cannot say how profoundly I was affected. You looked, I thought, like a lily struck down by the storm."

Vivianne withdrew from the clinging touch. The movement was so subtle that Lady Caerleon, absorbed in the pathos of her own rhetoric, failed to notice it. Still retaining the girl's hand, she continued :

"God's ways are not our ways. He was only transplanting His flower to its allotted garden, where it will blossom and cast fragrance."

Lady Celia felt that she could not stand this.

"You're awfully poetic, Gracie dawlin', but you must admit that God has been employin' an odd set of gardeners. I myself think that all Germans are possessed with devils. I keep consolin' myself with that bit out of St. Matthew—you remember—the legion entered into the swine, and they ran down a steep place."

Lady Caerleon had a vague smile for her friend's earthiness.

"Ah! Celia, that's what just makes everything so beautiful, that good may come out of evil. As for this dear child"—her fondling grasp of the inert hand was possessive—"I want, oh, I want to have her with me! I want to have her at Penpergan. She shall be married in the little chapel in the vale. You know, Celia, it now belongs once more to the Ancient Faith. It is so wonderful and mysterious, and there are such exquisite legends about it: How St. Brigid brought the foundation stone in her cloak. She was carried across from Ireland in a mystic boat. . . . St. Bride, some people call her. Oh, I must have her married there! St. Bride—that seems so right, somehow, so meant! We've got a most wonderful old priest; he's quite mediæval. I sometimes wish I had been born in your religion, dear Vivianne. I think it would have suited me. I am, at heart, a mystic, you see. I seem to understand it all. You will come to me, dear child; it would make me so happy."

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There was a pause. Peggy glanced expectantly at Vivianne, and then interposed hesitatingly :

"Oh, but she can't; I'm afraid. She's looking after David's arm. Doctor Evans settled not to get a nurse. She can't fail him now."

"Ah, she need not!" Lady Caerleon tenderly assured. "Dear little Peggy, how little you know me, if you think for a moment I should want her to give up her womanly work of love and mercy! She can motor over from Penpergan every morning, of course. I'll see that the car is at her disposal."

"I'd come and fetch her," said Peggy doubtfully.

Everyone knew that Lady Penpergan was not amenable to household disorganisation, and that her daughter-in-law, from her post in the clouds, was given to ignoring the fact, and plunging into effusive promises which had generally to be recalled, in exquisite language, by post next day. Perhaps Lady Caerleon had already had a slight misgiving on the subject herself, for her countenance became illuminated.

"But you must come and stay too! That will make everything all right. I couldn't dream of separating you two friends. Friendship is such a gift of God, and I know, Peggy, how sacredly you have taken its responsibilities to heart. So now it's all settled, is it not, dear lily bride?"

Vivianne answered at last, with a cold gratitude :

"Thank you very much. Perhaps it would be best."

Lady Celia sat reflecting on the situation; her handsome face wore its most discontented expression, but she was too shrewd not to perceive the advantage that lay in the unexpected invitation. There could be no more complete refutation of any nonsense that might get about, on the score of Peggy's *coup de tête*—not to speak of the scandal of a girl of Vivianne's age assuming the duties of a nurse to a man of David's—

than that the two girls should go straight to Penpergan Vale from Mrs. Jones's cottage. Old Lady Penpergan, invalid as she was, ruled in unchallenged supremacy over the opinion of the county. And if the whole of what Lady Celia characterised as "the absurd business" took place under the ultra-proper shadow of that middle-Victorian wing, no one could fling the smallest pebble at Peggy or Peggy's friend.

So, though Lady Celia said plaintively, "You know, Grace, you're really robbin' me," she meant the remark to be taken as settling the matter.

"Oh, dear Celia, you must let me help! You can't grudge me my mite; you've done so much already. To-morrow, then, dear children, I'll send for you. My Caer will be so interested! The dear fellow is so romantic; all true soldiers are romantic! In my letter to-night—I write to him twice a day—I shall have this pretty story to tell him."

Lady Celia got up.

"Yes, dawlin', it's charmin', and I feel quite happy about both these ridiculous children. But we must go home now."

Here, however, village etiquette once more reared a scared head. Poor old Mrs. Jones, who, as was only natural, could no more understand what was passing under her roof than if the proceedings had been conducted in a foreign language, had been standing apart, plaiting the fringe of her shawl and looking with innocent, faded blue eyes from one to the other. As Lady Celia rose, however, she advanced, trembling on the verge of hurt feelings. She trusted, indeed, their ladyships would forgive her boldness, whatever, and accept of a cup of tea.

Lady Celia's inner disapproval deepened. She wished more heartily than ever that war, German atrocities, refugees and broken hearts had not been

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thrust upon her placid existence. Mrs. Jones's tea was sure to disagree with her, and the sense of outrage at the thought of Vivianne marrying David was the more intolerable because she was quite conscious of its unreason. But she could not offend the guiltless and obliging ex-dairywoman; neither could she continue to avoid congratulating the bride.

"Oh, that is kind!" she said hopelessly. "I'm sure, Mrs. Jones, we are all very much obliged to you. It is very good of you to let us take possession of your pretty house like this. A cup of tea would be nice and warmin', wouldn't it, Grace?"

Having started the gratified old woman into a tremulous bustle, she sat down again and addressed Vivianne:

"My dear, I feel quite bewildered. If Peggy isn't pullin' my leg, or somethin', I'm sure I hope you'll be very happy." She choked down the sarcastic comment that rose to her lips: "I can't say you look it," and concluded, with an effort, "You ought to be; David is a good man. Of course, you can count on me to help you in every possible way."

"Thank you, madame," answered Vivianne.

Lady Celia was glad to turn away from the inscrutable eyes and the reproach they vaguely stirred in her, to devote herself even to Mrs. Jones's tea. But she was in so frankly bad a humour, as she drove home through the sleet, that Lady Caerleon uttered at last a faint remonstrance:

"Celia dear, you don't seem yourself."

"Oh, I know I'm not nice. I shan't be nice for some time either. I'm afraid I haven't been nice for two days." Her soft drawl gave a curious languorous emphasis to the repeated adjective. "Wait"—she went on—"wait till you've got a daughter, Grace dawlin', and she grows up, then you will know how hard life can be."

"Oh, dearest friend, our sweet Peggy!"

"I'm miserable about her. Well, I don't mind telling *you*. She and poor little Johnny Owen—such children as they were—there was a kind of engagement between them. I quite wanted it; and now, of course, Peggy thinks her heart is broken."

Grace Caerleon gave a gentle moan.

"Oh, Celia! Ah, this war; it is too cruel!"

Lady Celia, who certainly was not "nice," instantly hastened to interrupt the gush of sympathy by adding: "And Mrs. Jones's tea has given me a horrid indigestion."

CHAPTER XV

A "War Marriage"

ONE of the curious changes which the great war has brought into the usages of English society is the rapidity with which people rush into marriage. It seems as if, in this uncertain tenure of existence, anyone who loves at all is eager to take the chance of happiness, however fleeting, that may well never occur again. Many too are, no doubt, driven consciously or unconsciously by the instinct of all life to perpetuate itself, to leave something behind of their own gallant youth and strength prematurely and unnaturally doomed to destruction. Every facility is offered by the authorities. The "war marriage," hastily planned, hastily encompassed, for which the bridegroom has perhaps obtained twenty-four hours' leave, or perhaps no leave at all—in which case it is the bride who seeks the church nearest the camp—has become as accepted an incident in the new national existence as death on the battlefield.

Thus David and Vivianne found no obstacle to the knotting of their hasty bonds, more especially as Lady Caerleon had flung herself into its furtherance with soulful enthusiasm.

The little Catholic chapel at Penpergan was a typical relic of the old faith. You will find a hundred such scattered about the Welsh hills and in Ireland, where, mostly in ruins, they stand desolately testifying

to an abandoned fidelity. A few—these chiefly on great estates—have been taken over for the use of the reigning religion; only here and there has one been rededicated to its original intention. This was the case with St. Bride at Penpergan. In the little stone shrine (carefully restored by the pious devotion of a wealthy convert who had dwelt in the neighbourhood and founded a mission) the centuries were once more linked together by the unchanging sacrifice; and the prayers that St. Brigid herself had perhaps uttered before the rude altar hewn by the first hermit monk on that very spot, were again daily sent forth, if only by a scanty congregation.

It was on the eighth of December that was solemnised within these haunted walls the most singular ceremony they had ever witnessed. Here were made one by solemn vows Vivianne de Flesselles—*la petite princesse* of bygone days, now hunted, orphaned, destitute and exile—and the last Owen of Treowen, who had been robbed of his life affection, whose life plan had been laid waste and his lifelong sacrifice made vain by the same fierce stroke of Fate.

It was a very quiet service; one that seemed indeed almost appallingly brief in view of the tremendous issues involved; for since David was not of "the faith," the ceremonial was restricted to the barest formula.

The congregation was small: Lady Celia ostentatiously shivering in dark furs, not attempting to conceal her private disapproval; Lady Caerleon, beautiful in grey velvet and chinchilla, dressed as for a Mayfair wedding of pre-war days; the two Belgian ladies and their children; Peggy, white about the lips, red about the cheeks; Lord Penpergan, who gave away the bride and took his duty very seriously, not to say nervously; and Mr. Trevor Williams, David's best man, who barely restrained himself from protesting out

loud against the madness of the whole proceeding—these were the only wedding guests.

A few villagers had straggled in to look on, and were huddled, whispering, together at the bottom of the chapel. The Comtesse and the Baronne kept up a brisk conversation in undertones, interrupting themselves from time to time to jerk a sketchy sign of the Cross athwart their plump chests, and turn up their eyes in fervent if brief supplication. They made a good deal of rustling in shiny silks, and were calculated to drive the thought of prayer from the most pious. Lady Celia, firmly wedging Peggy against a corner of the pew, sat staring straight in front of her at the little carved stone altar, which Lady Caerleon had endeavoured to render nuptial with masses of arum lilies from the hothouses of Penpergan. "So appropriate," she had averred, "to the lily bride," whom she looked upon entirely as her own discovery. Lady Caerleon was, indeed, extremely busy during the ten minutes that preceded Vivianne's arrival. She went to and fro a dozen times, now sweeping into the sacristy, now pausing by David to murmur earnestly in his ear; now, after an elaborate genuflexion, shifting the position of a flower vase on the altar; with all these activities, however, contriving to seem not only calm but almost reposeful.

David knelt on the chair placed for him, without turning his head. Those who had seen him enter had noticed that he looked pale and tired. Behind him Mr. Trevor Williams stood rigid with empurpled, contracted visage, an embodiment of speechless protest.

"So long as she does not fail us at the end!" whispered Madame de Tirlemont to her sister. "I am not like thee. I have always thought the marriage the last absurdity. Will she make anyone happy, *cette Vivianne*? Ah, no; no more than she will let anyone

make her happy ! But, at the last moment, if she were to play us the trick now of backing out of the whole thing, I confess I would be furious—furious ! ”

“And I, then ! ” returned the other, shrugging her shoulders. “Such an opportunity of disposing of her and her long face ! But she’s quite capable of anything. What time is it ? Ah ! is that not the sound of the car ? Let us hope it is she—let us hope ! ”

They craned their eager faces over their shoulders. Into the small chapel, sparsely filled as it was, there came the stir which always precedes the entrance of the bride. Lady Caerleon rose with her inimitable air of serene importance, and sailed down the nave. Peggy hurriedly followed. “*Je la vois !*” triumphantly murmured the Baronne. And from the porch Lord Penpergan’s voice could now be heard in a creaky whisper : “Which arm do I give her ? Grace, which arm do I give her ? ” His daughter-in-law, with caressing gestures of gloved hands, put order into the little procession.

“Not too fast, father dear,” she warned, as Lord Penpergan, with starting eyes, prepared himself to rush forward with his charge.

“*Dieu, qu’elle est pâle !*” said Madame de Tirlemont.

The children, with round mouths, gave vent to long “Oh’s ! ” under their breath.

It had naturally been Lady Caerleon’s dream to dress her “lily bride,” as it was fitting, in the traditional robes of white. On the other hand, Vivianne had begun by declaring that she would be married in her mourning or not at all. But her new protectress was not a person to be easily or completely defeated, and her clinging persistency was even more effective than her neighbour Celia’s high-handed indifference to other people’s point of view. She had had indeed to modify a part of her programme ; nevertheless she had skilfully compounded.

Vivianne had been induced to consent to a travelling dress, and to let Lady Caerleon choose it. The white cloth, the white furs, the fur cap to match, with its two valkyrie wings and long white gauze veil flowing loose, suited the girl's strange white beauty as perhaps nothing else would have done.

"She looks like Brünnhilde," thought the romantic lady, and her heart rose with gratified pride. But at her next glance, as her protégée advanced up the church, she modified the simile, with a pang of pity, "Like Brünnhilde after the betrayal."

David never turned his head until his bride had reached the chair beside him. Then he cast one glance at her and looked down. Peggy, standing close to Vivianne, holding the huge bunch of lilies which the providence of Grace Caerleon had not omitted, felt the emotion of which he gave no sign overcome her like a kind of faintness.

The priest came out with his small acolyte. He was very aged and feeble—the diminutive mission had been given him as a rest in which to end his days. With kind, dim eyes, he peered at the wounded man, and then at the pale, cold bride, and hesitated as if he would have spoken a few words of benevolence. But perhaps he felt too old and far away, for he merely blessed them with a trembling gesture and began the ceremony.

David had to hold Vivianne with his left hand, and to wed her with it. It made him a little awkward and slow, and his hand trembled as much as the old priest's—not because of weakness, but because of the strength he was holding back. And in a minute or so all was over. They were blessed again—man and wife. The immense vow had been spoken: two lives were drawn from their own channels and flung into one course. Violent wonder of nature and solemn seal of the sacrament, the irrevocable had been accomplished!

Lady Celia shuddered and pulled her furs closer about her, whispering to Grace Caerleon that a wedding always gave her "the cold creeps." But Lady Caerleon, her starry eyes wide-fixed, remained absorbed in prayer, apparently unaware of the two large picturesque tears stealing down her cheeks.

Very reverently and slowly David paced the length of the little chapel, as if to lead his wife forth was still part of the ritual. Vivianne allowed herself to be embraced and kissed in the porch by her well-wishers. She even had a smile for Peggy that might have consoled the latter's sudden fierce misgivings, had it not been that the lips which touched her cheek were so deadly cold. And then the bridal pair entered the car, lent from Penpergan to take them straight to Treowen.

"Why are you cryin', Peggy?" asked Lady Celia irritably, as they were whirled along the snowy road back to Penarth.

"I don't know," said Peggy helplessly. "Because of David's face, I think; I thought he looked wonderful!"

"Don't talk nonsense, dawlin'," said her mother.

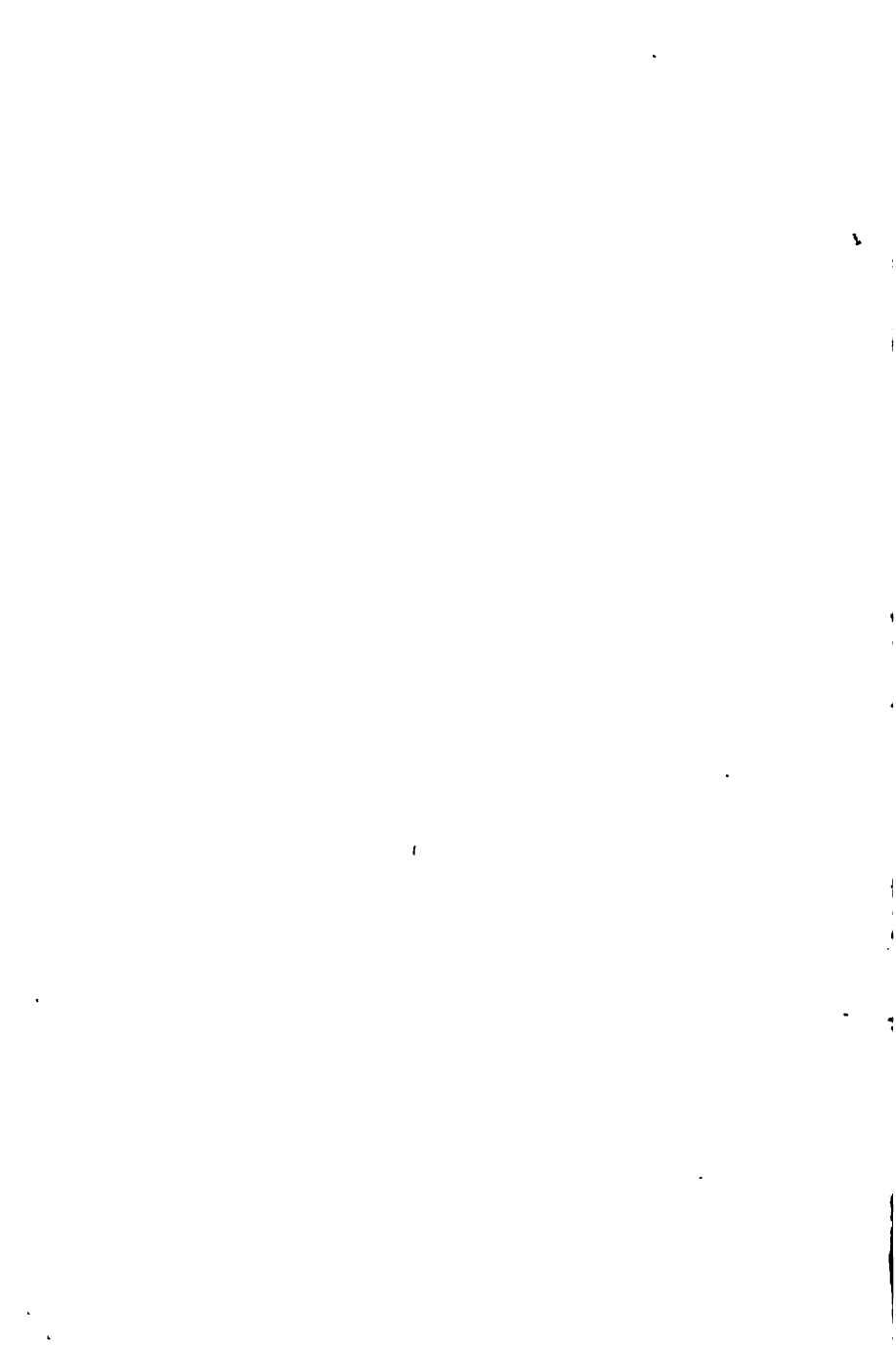
But she knew what her child had meant. She also had marked the expression of David's countenance as he turned it on his bride, and had contrasted it with Vivianne's inscrutable white face and downcast eyes of brooding.

Book III

OUT OF THE STORM

*"For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the elements' rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast. . ."*

BROWNING.



Book III

CHAPTER I

The Waif and the Master

DAVID took Vivianne's hand, and led her to the hearth; released her to fling another couple of logs upon the blaze, and then, straightening himself, remained gazing at her. It was only three weeks since he had first seen her. This had been his initial impulse: to bring her into his home, out of the storm like a lost lamb into the fold—to rescue, to shelter and cherish her. His desire had been accomplished. There she stood, her ungloved hand with the new wedding-ring resting on the ledge of the stone chimney-hood, beneath the rampant griffin of the Owen shield. . . . His wife! The dream which had haunted him with such persistency had seemed no less impossible to his waking vision, and no less vivid to his senses, than this reality.

Between them now fell the pause which, like the brooding lull before the storm, so often presages the greatest events of life—those events of which the crisis is in the soul. He had resolved to marry her because of her utter forlornness, because of her stricken youth, of her unnatural sorrows; having within his deep heart stores of ample compensation, and the tender longing to lavish them upon her. She had been robbed of house and lands, of her least possessions, even to her

very garments. Well, here was the ancient home of his race with which to dower her, the moneys he had gathered by his own labour, and the wealth still buried in Treowen earth—all should be hers, to spend as she would; his mother's gems for her to wear, and the long accumulated treasure of his ancestors to make life beautiful for her!

Poor white lamb! Her dam and sister-lamb had not escaped from the wolves that had come ravaging over the fields; they had been slain, and bloody mystery was about their graves. He was ready to stand to her for every affection she had lost—to be father and mother and sister; to envelop her with such untiring devotion, such compassionate, watchful, patient, enduring solicitude, that not one sore fibre of her being but would find comfort with him. She had fled from hideous conflict; here, he had peace for her, and all the loveliness and dignity of a great estate. She had been dependent on the charity of others; he would make her queen and mistress over all his possessions. . . . Thus David had planned; but there was more than this. To the infinite compassion of his intention there had been joined the mystery of the first passion of his manhood. And that was why he stood tongue-tied before her.

His dream had come back upon him, overwhelming. He remembered how, in that dream, he had gone out, driven by anguish, to seek Johnny, as a father may seek his child; how, gathering the lost and suffering one to his breast, he had suddenly thought himself to be clasping Vivianne, and known that he had found love, the greater glory dimming the less, all previous agony and joy had merged into unimagined ecstasy. And now, here was reality and no dream! Close beside him Vivianne stood . . . his wife! It was his ring that gleamed on the ivory hand resting upon the stone

beneath the emblem of his race. That ring, symbol of sacred and awful vows!

During their brief drive homewards there had been little but the great silence between them. She had drawn away from him; her gaze had avoided him. Her answers to the few gentle words he had spoken to her had been brief and hesitating. And—his own emotion had been too poignant—he had not trusted himself beyond the barriers of reserve. Yet now, upon his own hearthstone, he seemed less able than ever to break the silence. As he looked on her, he acknowledged to himself that she was a stranger, that she stood apart. He felt, relentlessly, that her thought wrapped her round, away from him. She held herself an alien—beautiful, mysterious—the woman he loved, his wife—but still an alien. Whatever language he spoke to her, it would yet be a foreign tongue. . . . If he dared upon the language of a lover, of a husband, would she understand him? He did not look back, he did not regret; but, simple, single-minded, passionate-hearted as he was, he was afraid of himself—awestruck at his own audacity. . . . This frail and precious thing that had been given to his keeping, how could he as much as touch it with his rough hand, lest he shatter it?

Vivianne moved, straightened herself and, turning from the hearth, let her gaze wander round the stately old room.

Peggy had been very busy in the house—a kind of fairy with a warm, human heart, she had flitted in and out, and superintended all the changes necessary to render Treowen fit for the bride she had brought to it. The oak parlour, she had settled, was to be Vivianne's sitting-room till circumstances should make possible the use of the drawing-rooms. An immense copper brazier had been placed in the window dais, filled with tawny chrysanthemums from Penarth; and on the

writing-table four arum lilies, in a tall bronze jar, lifted their pure white calyces against the deep background of the panelling. David's odds and ends had been cleared into a snuggerly downstairs, and a little necessary mending carried out on curtains and old brocade covers. To have changed in any way the character of the room would have been sacrilege in Peggy's eyes, but the forlorn, unkempt appearance had disappeared under her touch.

"One is very well here," said Vivianne at last.

She looked at David and gave him that shadowy smile which he had first seen on her lips the hour before their strange betrothal. His heart was beating so quickly he could scarcely answer.

"If you are content with it, with the poor old house, with our simple ways——"

The smile widened.

"I should be hard to please——"

He did not venture nearer to her yet, nor lift his free hand to take hers, but huskily he said:

"That is all I want."

"What?"

She gave a little laugh, unpinned her winged cap, and flung it, with her furs, on the big sofa. He had never seen her with such a softened air, and these natural gestures of the woman in her own home ravished him. The fire had called almost a flush to her pale face; she seemed to him divinely young, happy. . . . If he dared to think her happy!

"What?" she repeated.

"To please you."

Then she put out her hand.

"I think you are very good to me — you and Peggy."

The joining of the two names at such a moment might have bade him reflect; but he was past reflection.

The touch of her hand, her new, lovely graciousness went to his head like wine. His untried manhood, that honest ardour with which he had been wrestling, tripped and cast him in fair fight. He could no more now have held himself back than he could have altered the course of his dream: it was the ecstasy of that night vision that rushed upon him. He kissed her hand passionately, and then flung his left arm about her, crushing her to his breast. His lips lost themselves in the scented meshes of her hair. She gave a cry like a trapped creature.

"Do not touch me!" And with all her young strength she flung him from her.

She had struck against his wounded arm. He reeled as the agony stabbed him; but the physical pain was nothing to the pain of his wounded heart. "Do not touch me!" No man could misconceive the true meaning of that cry. His touch was horror to her. She revolted from his first embrace as from an insult!

Panting, she stood, her eyes flaming on him. He put his left hand on the table to steady himself.

"I beg your pardon. I——" He paused, bit his lips, summoning all his courage to save his dignity. "I ought to have known," he went on more articulately. "It has all been too quick. I should have remembered. I should have given you time. You are a child. For all you have suffered, you know nothing yet of life, of"—he lowered his voice instinctively—"of love," he said.

"Love!" she echoed. Her anger was still at its height; her single instinct was to wound him who had affronted her. "You know nothing of me. It is because I *do* know love!"

"Vivianne!"

"Because I do know love!" Her voice rang round

the old room. "I tell you this—if you touch me I'll kill myself!"

"You need not be afraid," said David after a long pause. "I never will again."

He stood a while longer, fixing her, in the profound silence, with a stern, mourning gaze. Then, his head bent, and swaying a little as he walked, he left her.

Vivianne remained where she stood, still palpitating with that madness of resentment, that suffocating sense of outrage.

With natures of such intensity it is feeling, never reason, that leads in moments of strong emotion. Vivianne had not paused to consider that the man she had flung from her was her husband; that the man for whom she had proclaimed her love had shown himself coward and forsworn. Joined to the fierceness of the recoil from David's embrace had come an overwhelming memory of past ecstasy. Had she been still Orlenski's happy betrothed she could scarce have felt less violated in pride and maidenliness.

But, as the heat fell from her and her pulses slowed down, facts reared themselves relentlessly before her. "What have I done?" she said to herself. "My God! what have I done?" She had not only repulsed, but insulted. An hour ago, before God's altar, she had vowed—of her own free will she had vowed! There came a trembling in her soul. She sank on the sofa, clasping her head desperately between both hands. "What have I done?" The question rang and rang again in her brain like the note of a tolling bell.

How he had looked at her! How he had left her! She went back over the scene, and once again her whole being stormed at the recollection. She felt that,

were David's love to reach out for her once more, she would strike as madly. "What have I done?" The burden returned, this time with a new significance. The torrent of fate had caught her. What was to become now of her—yes, and of David? David, who had shown himself devoted, thoughtful beyond imagination, generous . . . but yet not generous enough. If this was the bargain, she was trapped. He had asked her to come to him because of his loneliness, his helplessness, his wound, his need of womanly care, and he had turned upon her with the passion of a lover. She sprang to her feet and looked round wildly, seeking an escape.

David came in, closed the door behind him, and advanced in a quiet, natural way, before which her excitement seemed all at once extraordinarily out of place. There was colour on his lean cheeks and his eyes had a vivid light she had never seen in them before.

"I have just a few words to say to you," he began. His voice, like his manner, was composed. She looked at him without speaking. "There is one question I must put to you. I thought I knew your whole story. I find I know nothing. Have you told Peggy?"

The colour raced to her face; her pride leaped to his thought.

"Everything!" she cried, and then, deadly pale, sought gropingly for support behind her.

It was his right to drag the truth from her: was she to have the agony of it, the humiliation? He cast down his eyes, his nostrils dilated with a quick breath. Then he spoke again:

"Since Peggy knows, it is enough—I ask nothing. You and I have made a mistake," he went on. "There is no need to discuss who is to blame. We are, perhaps,

both to blame. There is nothing for it now, with either of us, but to make the best of it."

"I don't understand," she faltered. He could not have shown less emotion if he had been speaking to Nanny.

"It is not so very difficult to understand," he answered. "I am not going to propose anything desperate"—he paused and smiled faintly—"one way or another. You and I have taken a solemn vow together—I don't propose that we should break that vow."

"No?" she breathed, trembling.

"No; nor that we should keep it."

She drew a long, gasping sigh. Vaguely she apprehended his meaning.

"Let me go," she said in a faint voice. "There is nothing for me but to go. It is I—I who am to blame, and——"

He cut her short.

"No."

Eye and voice dominated her.

"You owe me that," he said presently in a gentler tone. "It is for me to decide. There never has been scandal upon Treowen—yet."

Cowering, she hid her face in her hands. He crossed the room and pulled the bell-rope. A faint jangle echoed from the distant depths of the old house.

"You will want to go to your room. I think your luggage has come. Luncheon—luncheon ought to be ready soon."

Surprise overcame her. She stole a glance at him; he was standing before the hearth, looking, as she thought, so perfectly self-controlled, so confident in his own strength, that she could hardly believe this was the man she had known hitherto. It is true that she

had only seen David the humble, timid lover. The master had not shown himself to her yet: the David who would not be conquered by circumstance, who was ready to grapple with his difficulties, to whom adversity was only stimulus to action. He had met misfortune before in this spirit, but even he had never found in himself this iron pride.

Lady Caerleon and Peggy had exercised their energies in helping to provide the modest household demanded by the altered conditions. The brand-new parlourmaid was of Lady Caerleon's engagement. And certainly, if spotlessness of cap and apron and shining smoothness of dark hair were a token of capacity, she might be regarded as a triumphant testimony to that lady's discrimination. She answered the bell with an alacrity unknown at Treowen for many a long day, and stood alert and beaming, looking interestedly from bride to bridegroom.

"Take Mrs. Owen to her room, Jessie."

"Yes, sir."

"Has the maid arrived?"

"Yes, sir."

"Send her up to Mrs. Owen when you have shown her her room. Vivianne, will you follow Jessie? Here,"—he caught the new servant's eye again—"you can carry that cloak and the furs up with you, too."

The girl's smile had been slowly wavering. Surprise and then doubt and disapproval appeared on her countenance.

"Yes, sir," she said, in an offended voice. "This way, ma'am, if you please."

Jessie had seen a good deal of suburban life, and believed herself versed in the ways of society. High or low, she knew very well, love and happiness are

much the same. Something was surely gravely wrong between these two. Why had the bride such a set, white face, and why did the bridegroom depute to another the loving duty of leading his young wife through her new home?

CHAPTER II

Parting Ways

VIVIANNE stood looking about her with a gaze that gradually apprehended. Even in the midst of the confusion in her soul it was impossible not to be struck with what she saw. In this wonderful old room Peggy's hand was no doubt recognisable in a score of delicate details—but behind Peggy's hand there was David's heart; and behind that, again, something that perhaps more impressed her—David's race!

She had taken as an offence from her husband—for the man was her husband after all—the first demonstration of love. She had had an inarticulate but overpowering sense of outrage, an irrational resentment as of helplessness abused, as of some monstrous advantage taken of her sorrows. Now—with that sudden shifting of the point of view which succeeds the blindness of passion—she saw, not only how little David had to gain by his marriage, how ponderously indeed the balance weighed on the other side, but also what traditions of greatness and honour she had insulted in him.

She had, perhaps, despite the melancholy dignity of all that she had hitherto beheld at Treowen, failed to understand in the least the inherent nobility of an old landed race, in this country of her exile. In her secret thought she had believed herself to be condescending to this untitled countryman. A startling conviction of the reality thrust itself upon her. Owen

of Treowen would have been fully the equal of any Flesselles in the days of their family greatness. But towards the hunted child of misfortune, how did it stand between them?

She shivered as facts pressed upon her. Out of all her attributes, within and without, pride had been the only possession left to her; she had clung all the more passionately to it. No extremity of destitution would ever have driven her to accept David's offer, but she had been unable to resist that hidden flattery to her self-esteem—that she could still aid; that she was wanted somewhere; that she was able to bestow a favour; that the balance of giving should be on her side. Furthermore, to have been able to send that letter to the man who had so lightly abandoned her in adversity was an opportunity of reprisal it had been scarcely possible for anyone so young to resist.

Now into what pass had this pride of hers led her? How had she placed herself? She had repudiated her side of the contract, and he would not even hold her to it! She had met a pride greater than her own, and she was going to live upon its charity. She had to do so—there was no escape; he had commanded it—she owed him obedience. Ignorant of life as she was, she realised that she would be the last of women were she to refuse herself to that single desire.

These thoughts flashed through her brain, these emotions seized upon her soul as her eyes roamed about her new surroundings.

Peggy had chosen for her friend the Queen's Room, so called from far distant tradition of some royal visitation. It was the room Johnny and she had joked about on that bygone spring day, and that he and she had innocently determined should be hers when

she became the bride of Treowen. It had cost her a great deal to give it, as it were, to another; and therefore, being Peggy, and sacrifice being all that was left to her, she had deliberately done so.

The immense Tudor bed was hung about with curtains of leaf-green satin embroidered in branching trees of gold. At the back of the tester the Owen crest and motto were wrought in the same style, surmounted by a royal monogram and crown, obviously added later by some proud hostess of royalty. A quilt of corded silk, once probably white as snow, now of an exquisite parchment tint, worked all over with interlacing design of pomegranates, birds and roses, lay on the bed. Peggy had rummaged this treasure out of a secret store in the linen room. She had not guessed at the value, but she had been enraptured by the beauty and the wonder of the old needlework.

On a curious little Italian table, where twisted vine stems with dropping grape-bunches in gilt bronze supported a round grey marble top inlaid with cherries, she had placed a bowl of lily of the valley. The vivid pale green of the forced leaves, just one shade brighter than the bed hangings, made a rich picture against the sombre panelling.

It was a long room, uneven as to flooring, the window set back in an oriel, as in the oak parlour below. Here stood the dressing-table, a curvetting Italian piece with faded gilding, and a chair to correspond. And Vivianne was stabbed with shame at the sight of the row of antique jewel cases laid out, awaiting her hand, beside a bunch of delicate, loose-leaved tea roses. The faint fragrance of the flowers reigned in the air.

Vivianne knew that Peggy had not placed those roses there. It was David who had joined them to the jewels—an act as delicate as it was poetical! Had she

brought a bride's love to her bridegroom, she realised how the gift would have enchanted her. "There are the jewels of my house, Beloved," it would have said to her, "but they are not exquisite enough for you or for our love; only the flowers can speak for me!"

She turned away; she could not look toward that dressing-table. Going to the fireplace she tried to warm her frozen hands, but the chill was from within.

Over the mantelpiece hung a Venetian mirror, curiously engraved, bearing the date 1670 beneath two interlaced hearts, from which delicate tendrils escaped to make an inner frame. It was worse than useless for reflection, a mere bit of cold, brilliant loveliness in itself. No doubt, like much of the furniture of the room, it had been the spoil of those adventurous days when Italian travel was part of an English gentleman's equipment for life, and some sprig of Treowen had not been behind the fashion.

The wall facing the fireplace was entirely covered by a memorial of more distant times. Upon a long stretch of tapestry a stag with wide antlers was leaping across a minute stream into the shelter of a forest—fantastically leaved—pursued by a huntsman and many baying hounds. A shadow out of the past all faded like a dream, the chase rushed on, a mystery of undying movement. In the middle of the panel, very close to the huntsman's brandished horn, some utilitarian Owen of the past had affixed a three-branched silver sconce. This had been polished for the bride's advent, and shone radiant as a frosty moon out of all the dim greens and browns. Perhaps it had been the same practical ancestor who had converted the companion hanging into upholstery for the long narrow sofa and the four great high-backed arm-chairs that stood guard along the walls. There was a straining hound's head on one seat, a tangle of fairy-tale forest

boughs on another, and along the sofa back a meek fawn bent her head to drink at a blue meandering rill.

Peggy only, thought Vivianne, could have heaped those cushions, shading from purple to mauve, at the end of this strange couch. But the bride knew, with the same sureness as she had known of the roses, that it was David who had flung that great white rug for her feet in front of it, and laid that Indian shawl, with its glow of oranges, violets and greens, ready for her to draw over her knees when she rested.

No one had ever told her anything about the great Queen Victoria's wedding presents; and though she guessed that this wonder of Eastern hue and texture, with its subtle redolence of sandalwood, had belonged to some Treowen ancestress, she had yet to learn that David's grandmother had been a favourite maid of honour at the English court.

How warm and old, and mellow and eloquent was this room that had been made hers! What stately old stories it told!—stories of splendour and dignity that do not grow shabby or die with age, but gain an added shade of honour with every generation. And what a new tale it told her now of the eager, thoughtful love that had prepared and laid out all that was choice and exquisite in this ancient house for her acceptance; that wanted to set her like a jewel in a rich casket, to cherish her as a being frail and precious for whom nothing could be found good enough, and no care adequate.

She remembered, suddenly, the bare, gaunt room where she had tended David's wound; the carpetless floor, the empty fireplace, the curtainless window cut in the stone, through which the night had looked blackly in upon them, and the contrast smote her! For him that had been sufficient.

There came a knock at the door. A flaxen head was thrust in, followed by the sprightly entrance of a

fresh-faced, smiling young woman. With further sinking of her humiliated spirit, Vivianne heard herself thus addressed in her own tongue :

"Madame will permit that I present myself? I am madame's new maid, if she will so please. Yes, it is a little surprise that monsieur has prepared for madame—to find a compatriot. I am from Malines, madame—Julie Arnoud at your service! Ah, it is so sad! Our poor Belgium—and Malines—what calamities! But, like madame, I have been well protected, *allez*. And I know my business, as madame will find. For me it is a great pleasure to be able to do something for my bread again. Charity, madame, is it not true? sticks in the throat. Besides, of course, the happiness to serve a lady such as madame!"

The girl was stepping about the room as she spoke, with precise, brisk movements, like a busy bird. She picked up Vivianne's furs, went to a cupboard with them, produced a dressing-bag from the same receptacle, and was beginning to spread its contents on the dressing-table, when Vivianne intervened at last :

"There is nothing to gain with me. I have no money to pay you."

The new maid started, looked discomposed for a moment, but instantly recovered her complacency. She made a gesture of deprecation :

"Let madame not disturb herself. It is monsieur who has engaged me. Monsieur or madame, it is the same thing now, is it not? And as for that, we poor Belgians, high or low, it is no wonder that we have no money, since we have all been pillaged."

Vivianne sat, leaning forward on the edge of the sofa, pressing her slender fingers against her lips. . . . Ah yes, the bread of charity had been a bitter morsel, but these gifts from the hand of a repudiated lover were harder still. How could she bring herself to touch what

she yet must accept? Her eyes wandered to the tortoise-shell and silver fittings which Julie was deftly arranging on the table.

"What are those things? They are not mine."

"Oh! but allow me, madame, they are indeed yours." The girl hastened to the sofa, proudly upholding the back of the hand-mirror. "Does madame not see her initials? V.O. O.—that is for Owen. And these jewels, they are also madame's." Having exhibited her proofs, Julie ran back to the table. "Has madame not examined them? May I, perhaps, bring them over to madame?"

"No."

"No? Then madame will permit me to put them away for the moment. I see madame is tired. As I came up they were about to serve the *déjeuner*. Madame will feel better when she has eaten. It is easy to understand that madame should feel *émotionnée*. For us poor exiles, now—if I dare speak of myself at the same time as madame—all is sad, even joy! Does madame change for the *déjeuner*? The trunk is in madame's dressing-room. I have been hanging up *les belles robes de madame*."

"*Les belles robes?*"

"Oh! two or three only, madame. It is again a surprise. That good Lady Caerleon—it is she who found me at the Aldwych upon Monsieur Owen's demand. He asked her to occupy herself about the trousseau. Ah, I have occupied myself a little also, I may tell madame! The day Lady Caerleon came to London and engaged me, she saw she had to do with one who understood. I have much experience of English ways, as I have been with English families; I flatter myself madame will not have faults to find. It is like a *conte de fées*, is it not, that madame should not even have seen her trousseau? But she will be

content; everything is of a discretion, of a chic, of a taste! . . . Nothing to shock—mauve ribbons, a grey *tailleur* with a black military sash—a dream! And a black velvet dress for the interior, and then *du blanc, du blanc*, and——”

“Oh, it is enough! I have heard enough,” cried Vivianne. She sprang to her feet. Which way could she turn? Where could she conceal herself to avoid these intolerable benefactions? “I cannot bear it!” she cried aloud. “As for you, leave me!”

Julie surveyed her new mistress a moment with a shrewd anxiety; then she shrugged her shoulders.

“Madame has only to command!” She went quietly from the room, to reappear, however, almost immediately. “Pardon, madame, the parlourmaid, she announces you that luncheon is ready. And also she has a message from monsieur. Monsieur Owen says he begs madame to excuse him; he has driven away to the hospital to have his wounds dressed. He regrets to have had to leave madame. Perhaps, he says, madame would like the company of little Boulotte?”

The girl delivered this speech with her eyes cast down and an air of complete demureness. Having concluded it, she swept over the bride a glance full of meaning and curiosity, and again took her departure.

Left alone at last, Vivianne stood staring into space. He had gone to have his wounds dressed at the hospital! . . . That meant he would not accept the service from her any more—the service which was the only justification of her presence here, the last stay of her self-esteem! If this was his revenge, it was well found; no decision could have more profoundly humiliated her. But no, it was not revenge; the truth in her disclaimed the calumny; it was the natural impulse of his own pride. She knew and understood this pride; the spirit in her answered to it. Vividly his whole presence rose

before her, as he had come in to her and taken his stand upon the situation she had created. Never had she dreamed that he could so look or so speak; she had always seen him beneath her, at her feet—suffering, appealing, inarticulate. She had never thought him capable of showing himself the master. She recalled the cry of fury that had escaped her: "If you touch me, I shall kill myself," and his answer: "I never will again." And suddenly her heart turned cold. He was a man capable of keeping that word.

"What am I doing here?" she cried.

Vivianne was very young and very ignorant; but there came a swift, appalling glimpse of the falsity and odious disintegration of the life she had, in one uncontrolled hour, destined for herself. What? She was to bear this man's name, live under his roof, sleep in the bed which he owned, eat of the food he provided, be waited upon by his servants, be warmed and clothed by his bounty, and yet remain nothing to him—nothing but the woman who had insulted him!

Again she had a wild longing to escape, and again honour barred the way. "I will have no scandal on Treowen," he had said. Obedience was the one coin in which she could still repay. If she refused him this, then she was bankrupt utterly.

And the first step along the difficult, inevitable way having to be taken, she smoothed her hair and washed her hands, and rang to be shown the dining-room.

CHAPTER III

Self Searchings

FINE snow had begun to drift up the valley early in the afternoon of Vivianne's strange wedding-day. She now stood in the oriel of the oak parlour, and watched the squall swirling onwards, obliterating as it came the wide distant view. Presently, in their turn, the undulating glades and crests of the park vanished from sight; then the stretches below the terrace whitened and were lost likewise; and soon the terrace itself became like a muffled vision of a dream.

She shivered and came back to the fire. It was of old wood, and burned with a clear, happy flame. There was a deep arm-chair set by the chimney corner. She sat down in it, spreading her pale, slender fingers to the blaze. The closing of the snowstorm about the house intensified the sense of solitude. The cold snow-light filled the room with a kind of livid dimness combated by the warm radiance that struck out from the hearth.

On a small, gate-legged table at her elbow were piled three books. She took them up one by one and read the titles.

"*La Princesse Lointaine*," "*L'Oiseau Bleu*," "*Pelléas et Mélisande*." In each was an inscription in Lady Caerleon's elaborate Elizabethan handwriting, appropriately poetical: "To the far Princess from her friend G.C." "May you be the Blue Bird of happiness in your new home." So ran the first two. In "*Pelléas*,"

the application of the gift to the recipient not being of happiest augury, Lady Caerleon had contented herself with a general sentimentality: "To my lily bride!"

Vivianne sat frowning. There was a dreadful sinking in her soul. Had she been what they all thought her, had she been able to bring David the joyful love of a wife, had David evoked in her but a faint shadow of what Ladislas had once called forth, how exquisite all this would be! What a fairy-tale charm might she not have found everywhere! What sweet, delicate emotions! But as it was, here she sat alone, on her wedding-day, desolate and tormented; and there was David, out in the snow, with his hurt pride and his stabbed heart, carrying his wounds to be tended by some paid helper! . . . He had established her in his home and placed his life at her feet, and she had insulted him. He would never condescend to allow her to fulfil the smallest womanly office for him again; she knew that. The future spread before her, as blank and chill, as unpierceable as the snow-world without; as intangible and shifting and baffling.

The thought rose in her mind: If Ladislas had done all this for me! If David were Ladislas! . . . And she was surprised to find there was no response of tragic ecstasy; rather was there a curious barring of her conscience, an inner recoil as from a baseness. She looked down at her hand with the new gold ring, and wondered. Could it be possible that she would ever love David? Was she made of such monstrous stuff that she should have resented to frenzy his caress only a few hours ago, and that it should now be her first and only love from whom in thought she shrank? "It must be that I cannot love anyone," she said to herself.

There was one quality supreme among the many and passionate faults of her character; she had an unswerving sense of truth. She would not be content to allow

herself to be cozened out of a frank contemplation of the bare facts, she could indulge in no softening illusions. It was this unsparing factor that had made life so hard to her in her calamities, and her own point of view so bitter. Charity had been only charity to her, kindness only pity; her own position not that of the honoured guest, but of the unwanted pauper. She had been one who could never accept the necessary compromise with the world, the tactful blurring of inconvenient realities which alone makes existence tolerable. Unable to spare herself, she could not spare others. Yet now she was irrevocably caught in a situation which could only be met by one long compromise. How was she to face it? She did not know; she could not even think. She was weary of fruitless self-communion—weariness of the unsolvable problem.

Taking up the book on her lap—the last she had handled—she opened it haphazard, bending forward to catch the firelight upon the faint French print.

"Je n'ai jamais vu de cheveux comme les tiens, Mélisande. . . . Vois, vois, vois, ils viennent de si haut et ils m'inondent jusqu'au cœur . . ."

"I have never seen such hair as yours . . ." That was what Ladislas used to say to her. Once he, too, had made her as Mélisande unbind her hair, and had passed his hand through the masses, and cried out: "How soft, how wonderful!" She bit her lip, and once more looked down at the page.

"Ils sont doux, ils sont doux comme s'ils tombaient du ciel! . . ."

Vaguely she remembered the story: that Mélisande was married, that Pelléas had no right to love her.

Why had Lady Caerleon sent her this play? She could not imagine Pelléas otherwise than her cousin, as he had been in his beautiful boyhood—ivory and gold! . . . Only Pelléas was gentle. That other had never been gentle—imperious rather, conquering, under his soft ways. Someone had once, in her hearing, said that the Pole is mingled of tiger and woman.—She must not allow herself to think of Ladislas!

She began to read again at haphazard:

MÉLISANDE: "*Baissez un peu la tête, seigneur. . . . Je vais essuyer votre front. . . .*"

GOLAUD: "*Je ne veux pas que tu me touches! . . .*"

The volume fell from her hand. "Was David like Golaud?" she asked herself; then she cast away the thought. No, it was not so; there was something of the finest chivalry mixed with his attitude of sternness toward her; even while he struck, he spared. She was too crudely unversed in the ways of life yet to understand to the full; but there was an undefined recognition within her of his generosity, of the strength of his manliness and his forbearance, of the extent of his power over her and his mercy.

The parlourmaid appeared carrying a reading-lamp; she closed the curtains, placed more logs on the fire, withdrew, to return with another lamp, and then inquired in distant tones if madam would like tea. Jessie was regarding her new mistress with increasing suspicion and disapproval; it was obvious that she held her alone responsible for this strange behaviour of husband and wife on their wedding-day. Furthermore—after due colloquy with Nanny—she had grasped the fact that the lady was a foreigner and a papist, and that the recent ceremony had taken place in a Roman

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Catholic chapel; and she felt quite sure that some dark mystery was at the bottom of the enigma.

Vivianne answered that she would like tea, with a meekness unusual to her. When the girl had reached the door, she arrested her by a hesitating question :

"Has Mr. Owen returned?"

"No, madam, he has not."

Jessie's air was that of one who would scarcely have been surprised if her master never returned again.

Vivianne went back to her book, a new uneasiness growing in her mind. Why was David so late? How horrible was this sense of the unknown opening like a black chasm before her! She wished she could distract her thoughts. What happened to *Mélisande*? It had escaped her memory. Yet once she and *Ladislas* had read this love-story together.

She glanced at the end pages. *Mélisande* died, while *Golaud* wept. . . . Well, that was a very good end! Oh, how she wished it might thus happen to her: to slip languidly away from under the unbearable burden of life, lying in that great green bed upstairs, with David lamenting at the foot of it—even as *Golaud* lamented. Yes, that would be a very good end of it all, and she would like David to mourn her.

"Oui, oui, je n'ai plus toutes ces inquiétudes."

How completely the words fitted her! She began to understand the mystic drama; it was life itself, not *Golaud*, not her innocent-guilty love for *Pelléas*, but the crushing relentless facts of nature that killed *Mélisande*. It would be the same with her; life and all its disquietudes! Surely she, also, would find the burden too heavy for endurance!

She turned over the page; then the blood rushed to her face in a hot tide.

"Veux-tu voir ton enfant?"

Oh, that was not for her! She did not know why her heart should begin to beat like a wild bird caught.

There was the sound of a heavy foot upon the stairs; she began to tremble; it was David's. It came up, paused a perceptible moment outside the door, and went on slower along the passage and up again. And she knew he was going through the shadow-filled, echoing spaces to his lonely room.

But presently, as she sat staring at the fire, she heard his tread again, lighter and quicker now, and to her infinite surprise he entered. From the door he glanced at her, and she saw a swift contraction of his face; he advanced, however, with that air of indifference which made her feel once more so helplessly at a disadvantage.

"Will you give me a cup of tea?"

With a nervous, unconscious movement she had started to her feet; she now sat down again.

"But willingly!" she said in her foreign idiom. There were two cups on the massive old silver tray. It was inexplicable, but her heart gave a little leap of comfort as she noticed them; he had not meant to leave her quite alone. Her hands shook as they moved among the china. It was the old yellow Spode of feast days at Treowen. *"Shall I put sugar?"*

"If you please—one lump." He extended his left hand.

"Oh, do let me bring it round to you!" she cried impulsively. *"Sit down; let me serve you!"*

He looked at her for a moment very gravely without speaking, then he said:

"Thank you, if you will be so kind."

He took a seat on the couch at the other side of the tea-table, and let her clear the space for him and set the tea, the cake and bread-and-butter to his hand. She thought, as she laid down the cup, how bitter was the drink that she had mixed for him, and remorse hovered in her soul. Faltering, she stood a few steps away.

"Was it very cold out?"

"Yes, very."

"You look perished."

He gave no answer. After a pause, she went on :

"Is it still snowing?"

"Heavily !"

He had folded a slice of bread-and-butter, but did not eat it, only drained his cup.

"Will you have some more tea?"

"If you please."

At every word barriers were being built between them. It seemed to her as if soon she would hardly be able to reach him at all. For a passionate nature there is nothing more unendurable than the sense of being isolated—thrust outside. With a painful effort, she said, as she placed the second cup of tea beside him :

"David, don't do that again !"

He glanced at her, under brows drawn together.

"Do what, Vivianne?"

"Go away to the hospital—not let me do my work for you. I came for that . . . first. I—oh, it's all I can do !"

Her voice wavered and fell. He dropped his glance. At last he said, with a deliberateness that put her finally and completely from him :

"It will have to remain this way now."

The iron wall of pride, how implacably it reared itself before her !

Jessie entered upon their silence.

"If you please, sir, Mrs. Price wants to know, is she to send up the child?"

David looked at Vivianne; the hard expression had gone from his face, his air was apologetic.

"She generally comes up to me after tea."

"Oh, please let her come now!"

She was glad to think that there was the child in the awful blank between them.

Old Nanny brought her little charge in herself—Nanny, with an alarming begoffered cap, who gave a distant curtsy to her young mistress and a withering glance at her master, and then led Boulotte forward, as if she had no other preoccupation.

"See how you're stepping now, Bullet *back*! Don't be knocking yourself against the corners whatever; there's strange the room will be to you with the furniture all moved about! It's sorry I am to be disturbing you and the lady, sir. Indeed, it's no rest she was giving me, the poor lamb! not knowing in her innocence the way everything's changed at Treowen."

"That will do, Nanny," said David sharply.

"And thanking you, sir, for showing me my place, as it is now to be. Indeed, yes, yes; there's strange times, and the Lord has curiously afflicted this house! The young to be taken before their time and the old to be left, when it would be a mercy to have been removed out of the sorrow and the changes!"

David had cast down his eyes at the allusion to Johnny; now he raised them again upon the old woman.

"You can leave the child!"

Boulotte sat herself squarely on the bearskin before the fire with the air of an habituée, and held up her arms for the doll that Nanny clutched.

Having delivered the toy, Mrs. Price began rocking herself backwards and forwards, like an old sibyl in the throes of inspiration. Looking from David to

Vivianne: "There's woe for Treowen!" she cried wildly, flung her apron over her head and, weeping aloud, hurried from the room.

Boulotte stared round-eyed at David, and began to pull her lip. He picked a lump of sugar from the bowl and threw it to her, then turned to Vivianne.

"You must excuse Nanny; she has been a faithful servant of the Owens, but she is so old now, she does not quite know what she says or does."

"I think she knows very well," said Vivianne briefly; and added, clasping her hands between her knees, after her fashion when driven to the limit of endurance: "I warned you, that first day—I cast a shadow!"

He did not reply for a minute, then:

"There is no use looking back," he said, rose, went over to the window-seat, and returned with a box of bricks for Boulotte's nightly game.

Vivianne did not know what she had expected him to answer, but his words struck cold upon her heart. . . . True, there was no good in looking upon the past. But the present—but the future?

CHAPTER IV

The First Wedded Day

JULIE had spread on the bed, ready for her mistress, the only tea-gown in the choice but scanty trousseau which Lady Caerleon had chosen, at David's request, for his penniless bride. The lady's romantic taste had allowed itself full play in this garment, which was of white velvet, sumptuous yet simple, cut on mediæval lines, bordered with white fur. Julie found much pleasure in shaking out the pearly folds in the sombre old room, and greeted Vivianne with voluble enthusiasm as she entered to dress for dinner.

"For sure, madame will wear the tea-gown? Since there is but one tea-gown, madame cannot but wear it. But madame will be pleased with her tea-gown! Will she cast a look at it? Lady Caerleon—ah, she has taste! For the occasion it is the perfection. One could not dream anything better, especially for madame. And madame will forgive me: I have ventured to select, of the jewels, this great cross of rubies and diamonds for her to put round her neck. It will be the only colour on all the white. The rubies, as madame sees—what does madame say?"

Vivianne looked from the flashing jewel which her maid held swinging by its long chain, to the creamy robe on the bed.

"I said," she repeated, "I will wear my black gown."

"Madame!"

"Is there not a black gown in the trunk?"

"Oh, madame, a poor little rag! Forgive me, madame, it is all crushed and shabby! And black—black on the day of madame's marriage?"

"But I am none the less for that in mourning!" "The more, the more!" cried her tormented spirit. Aloud, she went on: "Do you not know, have you not heard, that my mother and my sister have been murdered?"

Julie's agitated countenance instantly assumed a calmly conventional expression of sympathy:

"*Si, si, madame! Oh, c'est bien triste, allez!* What we have all to suffer, *c'est inouï!*" But she could scarcely muster a decent show of interest in a question so beside the mark. With all the rest of the world, she had become accustomed to German deeds of "frightfulness"; one fresh instance could scarce evoke emotion, much less surprise, in a mind thus occupied with more attractive concerns.

"But madame is a bride! The newly married never wears mourning. That is received. And on the wedding-day; it would be of an augury! . . . Monsieur Owen would be so saddened, so saddened! And indeed I can assure madame that in the best families it is no longer the fashion to wear black for the war."

Vivianne hesitated. Then a sudden twist of mood came upon her. David had shown himself calm, every-day, indifferent after their vital disagreement! He had just now played with the child, built houses of brick for it, laughed with it, as if he had had no other care; no man could have thus laughed had he not been really, at the bottom of his soul, unscathed! Englishmen were cold; their pride alone was strong. It was only David's pride that she had hurt, and he was gratifying that pride by forcing upon her a position of inferiority. She had meant to strike back at him by

coming down in her old garb, in the robe of mourning for which she was not indebted to him; but perhaps this would be a mistake. She had no choice but to be humiliated. Even if she appeared on her wedding-night at his board in the crushed black "rag," thus asserting the last remnant of her independence, she would have none the less to sit and eat of his fare. She was utterly on his bounty. The little black dress would be but a pitiful signal of her impotence. To come down beautiful, in the garments he had paid for, and yet remain aloof, cold, silent, enduring, was not that a higher pride?

To look beautiful—it is woman's natural weapon against men!

When Julie had robed her, Vivianne stood long, gazing at her reflection in silence. The gown, by a singular coincidence, had a strong resemblance to the rather fantastic garments her lover had liked to see her wear at Flesselles. Now she belonged to another man, by her own vow; and his bounty had bestowed this raiment upon her! In the morning the fierce recoil from the present and the aspiration to the past had filled her with a kind of madness; to-night there was no such feeling. She examined her own fairness with a stirring of pleasure, the unreasoning eternal feminine in all its true perverseness was paramount. She could still perhaps have killed David had he dared to claim her, but this new glacial indifference of his was an offence to her womanhood nevertheless.

"Will not madame sit down and let me attach the cross?" insinuated Julie, who could scarcely breathe for rapture at the success of her ministrations.

Deck herself in his jewels! Vivianne could not do that!

"No—no," she said decidedly.

"At least," implored the maid, "these few flowers—

one little hint of colour!" She pulled three tea-roses out of the bunch she had herself arranged in a vase that morning, and feverishly dried the long stems on her apron. Vivianne hesitated; but the maid, eager-fingered, did not wait for denial.

So, after all, it was clothed as a bride, and with his roses at her breast, that David's unwilling wife went down to the first dinner at Treowen.

He was standing in his favourite place by the fire in the oak parlour. After a single, searching look at her he averted his gaze. Many times, in the next few days, she was to see him do this, and always be affected with the same sense of being baffled and denied. Ceremoniously he gave her his arm to lead her into the gay Chinese breakfast-room which Peggy had wisely decreed for their use as dining-room in preference to the banqueting hall. Green trees with marvellous flowers and fruit spread all round its walls; curtains of green tabinet fell from quaintly battlemented valences. The table was round, no larger than need be for two; and the light from the four massive Georgian silver candlesticks, green-shaded, fell on a silver punch-bowl filled with violets. Any setting more ideally and prettily intimate for a first evening together could scarcely be imagined.

Vivianne wondered if David's heart felt as anguished as her own, if it was only the effect of the shades, or whether he was really as pale and wan as he seemed; whether she, too, looked to him like a ghost, as she took her place opposite to him. The delicate head of one of the roses snapped as she unfolded her napkin. She glanced quickly at him. Had he noticed that she was wearing his flowers?

His eyes swept over her, and came back to his plate. Impatiently she took the other two flowers from her dress, and put them down beside the broken one.

"You can take them away," she said to Jessie.

David gave no sign.

"What wine will you drink?" he asked her.

"There is champagne, sir," said Jessie.

To drink champagne, that would have been the last touch of the grotesque!

"No wine, thank you," said Vivianne. "Water only."

"I will have ale, as usual," said David.

Jessie's outraged feelings could hardly wait for expression till she had reached the kitchen. "The master wants ale, as usual. She's drinking water. Neither has a word to the other; both sitting there as pale as death. It's the queerest match that ever I saw!" She poured forth her tale of horror to the new cook, an Irishwoman, who clacked her tongue, but optimistically opined that couples were sometimes apt to turn queer at first; you never could tell how it would be with them, and that Jessie had better take no notice.

There was silence, indeed, between the bride and bridegroom in the Chinese room. At the best of times David was a silent man, and Vivianne little given to ordinary conversation. As matters stood, what could they say to each other? Once she asked him if it was still snowing, and he answered that he had not looked out of the window that evening. Then, feeling that it was incumbent upon him to make an effort in his turn, he volunteered the statement that it was bad weather for the lambs.

She gazed at him with faint surprise: "Lambs! Did they not belong to the spring?"

"There is also the house-lamb."

"The house-lamb?"

"Yes—early lamb for the winter market."

"Oh, horrible!" she exclaimed. "Born out of season for greedy people to eat."

He gave her, at this, a humouring smile. "Does it seem to you so much better for them to be eaten at Easter?"

"I suppose not." Her lips took their bitter twist. "It is just part of it all, of life—the odiousness of it!" She sent away all that remained on her plate untouched.

A little later she noticed how, with his left hand, he slowly and painstakingly cut his meat, and cried, half starting from her seat:

"Oh, let me do that for you!"

But he thanked her, and there was the finality in his tone that she already knew. He rang the bell and ordered the servant to cut up the pheasant wing into pieces.

"Nanny used to see to this," he added, glancing at his wife.

Vivianne felt that he did not wish her to think him unkind, but that now, across a certain limit which he had very firmly traced, she was not to be allowed to go. She bit her lip and dropped her eyes; the tears had started, stinging, but she would rather die than let him see her shed one.

As soon as she could do so, with any decent regard for conventionalities, she rose; he opened the door for her to pass out. Aimlessly she went back to the oak parlour and sat down again by the hearth, wondering whether he would join her there. Over the small as on the great things of their life the veil of the future was impenetrably drawn. The daily continuance of such an experience as she had just gone through was more than either of them could endure, she thought; yet he evidently intended their relations to go on just in this manner and no other. . . . Neither to break nor to keep their vow! If this was how the paradox was to be worked, for her it might prove beyond her strength.

She took up another of Lady Caerleon's books, and tried to abstract her mind, but the words made no sense to her brain. She looked at the tall, ancient clock. Only nine! . . . Another half-hour at least before she could decently retire to her room. At last she heard his step, and could hardly distinguish whether she were glad or sorry when he came in. He took the old stiff, carved chair on the opposite side of the hearth with a deliberate air of one who means to remain, and she felt that he was searching in his mind for something that he could say to her, artificially to span the chasm lying between them. Small-talk was certainly not David's gift.

"Have you everything you want?"

"Oh, yes, thank you!"

Resentment was gathering in her heart. She felt a malicious satisfaction in emphasising the futility of his effort.

"Lady Caerleon left some books for you. I hope they are what you like."

"It was very kind of her—they are most interesting, thank you." She lifted the book on her knee, as if to resume an interrupted reading; but her hand shook and she laid it down again.

"There are a lot of old books downstairs. They might amuse you. I will show you the library to-morrow."

"Thank you."

David remained a moment silent; then he rose and stood with his back to the hearth, his eyes wandering round the room.

"I am afraid the piano in the drawing-room is very old—if you would like a new one——"

He had caught her unawares, and she cried out with a piercing sharpness:

"Oh, no!"

His brows drew together in that strong frown she had already seen once or twice, he fixed a long gaze on her; then, once again, averted his eyes. The mad heart-beats pulsing in her ears calmed down in the silence that ensued. Then he began to speak again, and there was a colder note in his voice.

"I have placed a hundred and fifty pounds in the bank to your account. I propose to renew this sum quarterly—please let me continue—out of this money you will, if you please, pay your own maid's wages and everything concerning your personal expenditure, nothing else. I have only mentioned your maid in order that you may feel quite free with regard to her. All other charges connected with the household——"

She interrupted him, her pale cheeks flaming.

"You pay for everything anyhow—you only wish to insult and humiliate me!"

He waited perceptibly before replying.

"That is foolish. You have certain responsibilities as Mrs. Owen of Treowen, which it is your duty to meet, and for which it is my duty to see that you are suitably provided." Then he added, in a lowered tone, which, despite an obvious effort, betrayed emotion: "I made these arrangements yesterday, I cannot go back upon them. Your cheque-book is in the drawer of the writing-table."

"Oh, I am ashamed!" said Vivianne between set teeth.

She sat staring at the fire, wringing her hands. He did not seem to hear or notice, but went back to his arm-chair, and in his turn sat gazing at the leaping flames. Half-past nine struck in the corner from the old dim-sounding bell of the clock. Vivianne sprang to her feet.

"I am going to bed," she said.

He rose, went to the door, opened it:

"Good night; I hope you will sleep well."

He stood holding the door; there was no response to the half-involuntary movement of her hand towards him. She bent her head as she passed out; a stronger will than her own was crushing her. "I never will touch you again," he had said. It was certain that he meant to keep his word.

CHAPTER V

A Censorious World

AFTER the excitement of the wedding, Peggy flagged. She had perhaps the feeling that there was very little left for her to do, now that she had mended two broken lives, and furthermore established the fortunes of Treowen. Perhaps she could not help a heaviness at heart to think of the happiness beginning where her own had ended.

In spite of her modernity, she remained the child to whom marriage, in life as in fairy tale, meant necessarily the end of sorrow. "They were married and lived happily ever afterwards"; with her it was almost as much an article of faith as the axiom that when the good die they go to heaven. That marriage could be the knotting of the problem of life, instead of its solution: that it might prove the launching of the Ship of Fate upon stormy seas, instead of the anchoring in the waters of a safe haven—such possibilities had never dawned upon her.

Moreover, besides her ignorance of the hard facts of existence, Peggy had an unbounded belief in David, in "Johnny's brother," good, strong, kind! If in the whole world there was anyone to whom a woman could turn with unfailing confidence it was surely "Johnny's brother." It seemed to herself that, in giving him to Vivianne, she had given away the last precious thing that yet remained to her. She missed her daily visits to Treowen, as well as all the excitement of the wedding

preparations; she missed, too, though in a minor degree, the demands which the companionship of Vivianne had made upon her. At any other time she must have felt the days very empty and purposeless; but in war-time nobody need lack for occupation, and she flung herself with renewed ardour into her work among the wounded and the refugees.

A week had elapsed when Lady Celia suddenly intervened.

"Peggy, dawlin', you're lookin' wretched! I won't have you tearin' about the place like this any more."

They were at lunch. Peggy had come in late, had declined any hot dish, and sat cutting up a slice of ham and crumbling a roll with the air of one who merely eats to live.

"It is true," said Madame de Tirlemont, "Peggy seems to me to have a very bad mien, ever since Vivianne's marriage. The poor little one, she has fatigued herself with all her arrangements."

"Ah, and with that," put in Madame Hollebeke, "how she fatigues herself now! Tell me, dear Peggy, where do you come from, so late?"

"From the hospital," said Peggy. "No, no pudding, thank you, mother. I'll have a bit of cake—that's all."

"There's too much hospital," said Lady Celia complainingly.

"Oh, mother!"

"Dawlin', it's nonsense. What can a little girl like you do?"

"I can help, and I like it. And they like having me, and——"

Madame Hollebeke, who prided herself on her tact, attempted a diversion.

"And, talking of Vivianne, have you heard from

her since her marriage, *chère petite?*" Peggy shook her head.

"No, not one word? That is strange. Have you, Lady Morgan?"

Lady Celia arched her eyebrows.

"Why should she write to me?"

"*C'est vrai*," interpolated Madame de Tirlemont acidly. "It is Lady Caerleon who has taken everything on herself. No doubt Lady Caerleon has all the news—while we, Vivianne's relations, and you, her first friend, not to speak of that dear Peggy who has done so much, are all cast on one side!"

"Grace has gone to London," said Lady Celia irrelevantly. "Caerleon is home on a few days' leave. Grace is quite, quite mad! I'd wish myself back in the trenches if I were he."

"But speaking of Vivianne," persisted Madame Hollebeke. "I went to see those poor Verhagens in the village—and I heard such a droll report."

"A droll report?" echoed Lady Celia with a faint air of insolence. "Poor people are always talkin'. Peggy, you must have a glass of wine."

"*C'est un homme très bien*, that Verhagen: quite intelligent even. He has been a schoolmaster."

"Oh, I know—quite a nice man, as you say. He's helping at Penywent hospital, I believe."

"Precisely!" cried the Baronne in triumphant tones; "and it is from him I have heard the strange story of Vivianne."

"Strange story?—of Vivianne?" cried Peggy, colouring.

"Will Lady Morgan permit the children to retire?" intervened Madame de Tirlemont, with a meaning air.

"Oh, certainly!" Lady Celia felt cross but curious.

"But there's nothing one could not say before the

children, *chérie*," Madame Hollebeke declared, shrugging her shoulders. "*Mon Dieu*, there is nothing to make a fuss about! It seemed to me a little strange, *voilà tout!* But, no doubt, there is a most natural explanation if one only knew it. If Mr. Owen prefers to go to the hospital to have his wounds dressed——"

"What?"

Peggy had now become white.

"Every day, *ma chère* Peggy, beginning on his wedding-day. M. Verhagen has assisted, he tells me, on more than one occasion. *Du reste*, the wounds are healing well."

"Do you call that so strange?" drawled Lady Celia, her golden eyes on her daughter's startled face. "I expect David finds they do him better at the hospital."

Madame de Tirlemont broke into laughter.

"Good! There's the explanation all found. Lady Morgan has more wit than thou or I, Jeanne. She sees it all from here. *Cette bonne Vivianne*, she made the poor man suffer excruciatingly! *Au fond*, what did she know of nursing? And the moment that he had no longer to pay his court, *ma foi*, he went to be bandaged elsewhere."

The tone of these remarks was so obviously insincere, that Peggy's disclaimer: "Dr. Evans said Vivianne knew quite well how to do everything," seemed altogether superfluous.

Peggy sat looking down at her plate with a frown and a trembling lip, while the sisters exchanged glances of significance.

"What are you going to do this afternoon, dawlin'?" said Lady Celia, as if she considered the matter thrashed out.

Peggy started and turned her bright eyes defiantly on her mother.

"I am going to Treowen."

The Belgian ladies cried out in a mixture of surprise, reprobation and amusement; then both stopped to stare at Lady Celia, who, however, had not said a word, but was merely gazing distractedly at her child.

"They've only been married a week, Peggy," she began at last, and paused.

Her guests rushed ingratiatingly to uphold her.

"There is an idea!"

"Nobody expects to be visited during the honeymoon."

"You would not be thanked for your amiability."

"And, even," concluded Madame de Tirlemont, picking a salted almond from the dish before her, "if it is not love that smothers them—which I have always doubted from the beginning, *car, enfin, cette Vivianne, elle est par trop fantasque*—at least let them do their first quarrelling in peace."

"I must go, mother," said Peggy, when the gust of objections had subsided.

"Very well, dawlin'." Lady Celia got up. "We'll all go."

"But, mother——"

"Yes, dawlin', I'm sure Madame Hollebeke and Madame de Tirlemont would like to go.—Wouldn't you? You'd like to see for yourselves that everything is all right. Of course, we know it is. David is perfection, and Treowen is a charmin' old place. But bein' your relation and all that, she'll be expectin' you before anybody else, I am sure. I'll send over the boy on his bicycle, Peggy, and announce our visit for tea. Vivianne will be delighted."

It was not at all what Peggy wanted; but even undisciplined daughters must sometimes be content with half victories.

Lady Celia could hardly have explained to herself why she was so set on accompanying her girl to

Treowen. There was something of jealous curiosity in her decision, coupled with a real uneasiness on the score of Peggy's health and spirits. Rightly or wrongly, a mother always imagines that she can stand between her child and the difficulties and emotions of life.

When the huge blue car started off, packed after the fashion abhorrent to its owner, the latter was considerably out of humour. It is a trial to the managing woman to find the course of life proceeding just as if she had never strenuously endeavoured to interfere with it.

She had got rid of Vivianne; and yet there was Peggy, with her little white face opposite, her eyes staring out vaguely across the landscape, quite as self-absorbed and woe-begone as when under the influence of that morbid companionship. She had schemed to eliminate the shadow of Treowen and relegate the memory of Johnny into the background of broken toys; but Treowen, and everything appertaining to her lost lover, had possession of Peggy's imagination to a degree that exceeded even that of the early days of her grief.

If the absurd marriage were to turn out badly—and there was every probability that it would—Peggy would, very justly, take the blame upon herself. Then heaven knew what further complications it might not bring upon them! Besides this, there was an odd personal vexation that the girl whom she had so consistently disliked should be now in the position that should have been her Peggy's.

Lady Celia had always wanted Treowen for her child; and although, with Johnny, these hopes had necessarily died, the maternal instinct, than which nothing is more prone to envy, secretly fretted and resented. These feelings deepened now, as the valley

grew wide before them, and the vision of Treowen crowning the hill rose beautifully above the river. She could not bring herself to point out this first view of the place to her companions; and it was only when Madame de Tirlémont exclaimed: "Ah, but how fine! How ravishing! What is that property? It stands like one of our châteaux on the heights of the Meuse. Is it not so, Jeanne?" that Peggy said: "That is Treowen!"

Nor did further impressions tend to diminish the mother's sense of injury. Peggy could at least take credit to herself for the material change she had helped to bring about the neglected, solitary house. The entrance hall was no longer the receptacle for grain samples and circulars, catalogues, all the flotsam and jetsam of the agriculturist's post and parcel bag. The lamps were lit, the great hearth blazed; a copper bowl of evergreen boughs on the central oak table flung delicate shadows against the stone. Passing through these dignified spaces, Lady Celia told herself that Treowen was the one place in the county she had always coveted; and as she entered the oak parlour her discontent deepened.

It was almost a satisfaction to note, with one shrewd glance, that something was certainly amiss with the newly married couple. Yet it required her special acumen to discover this from the outset; for David and Vivianne received their self-invited guests—the one with so much simplicity, the other with such unexpected grace and self-possession, that Peggy's spirits went up with a bound, and the Comtesse and the Baronne scarcely attempted to conceal an acrimonious surprise.

"But she has had luck, that tiresome Vivianne!" was the burden of the latter's thoughts.

There was, needless to say, a good deal of chatter where these vivacious ladies had so much to notice and

discuss; and the movement about the tea-table, the passing round of dainties, laughter and exclamations occupied a half-hour to the exclusion of any intimate or serious conversation.

But, sitting apart, Lady Celia, befittingly waited upon as chief of the party, rolled her liquid gaze and, with apparent abstractedness, observed a good deal. She would have attached no importance to the fact that they scarcely addressed each other, since both David and Vivianne were silent, not to say abnormally reserved people, and the situation was one which might well provoke shyness. But that they should avoid even looking at each other was indeed ominous—one of the most unmistakable signs of the enamoured being that faithful following of each other's movements with tender eyes.

Now that she came to see him more closely, Lady Celia thought David looked ill and sad. She thought, too, that about Vivianne there was a suppressed excitement which contrasted vividly with what she remembered of her former apathy. Anyone but a child, a silly child like Peggy, ought to have known that it was madness to bring such incompatibilities together! . . . That self-centred, vindictively tragic, darkly inscrutable girl, and poor, unsophisticated, honest, countrified David! Vivianne's share of the bargain was only too obvious, but David!—Lady Celia could not conceive what had led him to such folly. It seemed incredible that he should have fallen in love with anything so exotic, so apart, so completely out of harmony and perspective with his own life and surroundings. . . . But men were unaccountable beings! The strange face with its alabaster pallor, the hair with its unnatural depth of hue, those long, slow eyes with their profound reproach, those close-folded lips, the whole odd, uncanny beauty of the creature had flung

its spell over him, no doubt. Or perhaps it had been just some quixotic madness of pity. . . .

"And how is the poor arm?" inquired Madame Hollebeke suddenly.

She had partaken of an excellent tea; and now, rising from the table, selected a seat between Lady Celia and their host, who sat silently facing each other. David thanked her. It was very much better, he said, but the doctor was still strict about the wearing of his sling.

"Poor David!" said Lady Celia, forestalling deliberately the Baronne's next question, "I am afraid it will be a long time before you are well again."

"I shall have to make up my mind to do most things with my left hand for the rest of my life," said David steadily.

"Ah! *mon Dieu*, I——"

Madame Hollebeke was not easily put on one side. But Lady Celia had a smooth power; she pursued monopolisingly:

"You ought to see a specialist. Dr. Evans is all very well, but——"

The Baronne nipped in with a weasel-like sharpness.

"Dr. Evans?" she echoed. "That is the doctor of the hospital where that excellent professor Verhagen goes to assist with the wounded. You have met him, have you not? He tells me that you are there every day for the dressing of your poor arm."

"*Mais non, chérie*"—Madame de Tirlemont caught the ball on the hop, got up in her turn from the tea-table, and came over to join the trio, all sprightly guilelessness—"you must quite have misunderstood that good Verhagen. Is it not our little Vivianne here who is the Red Cross nurse for her husband? You have not forgotten how the romance began?"

"Verhagen could scarcely have invented," cried the

Baronne, with a clever assumption of disconcertedness. "He nevertheless assured me, that man——" She broke off, to resume with an inviting smile: "But how foolish, this discussion! Mr. Owen will tell us at once who is in the right of it."

"I will tell you," said Vivianne. "My husband goes to the hospital."

"*Mais, Vivianne!*"

"Hospitals are instituted for such purposes," said David.

Both Lady Celia and Peggy glanced at him with surprise. His tone and air were imposing; even the two little foreigners, with their greed of curiosity, their remorseless indiscretion, could not venture upon further investigation.

"You have not seen my small friend, Boulotte, have you?" went on David, addressing Lady Celia. There was a dignity and ease in his manner which completed her astonishment. She who had begun to think him hopelessly rustic and out of the world found herself admiring, perhaps, too, regretting.

"Who is Boulotte?" she asked languidly.

"Oh, do let me go and fetch her!" cried Peggy. "Don't describe her, David; she's too precious!"

Hardly knowing what she was saying, she ran out of the room without waiting for an answer. Misgiving filled her soul. David was unhappy. As for Vivianne, she could scarce find words to define the feeling that had come to her of the bride's restlessness and secret misery. Why did David go to the hospital? How wide must be the breach that had brought this about!

Peggy had been accustomed to run about David's house with a freedom she had not known in her own; but she was soon confronted with the change brought

by the new state of affairs. As she dashed along the stone passage which led from the hall to the kitchens, she was met by Lady Caerleon's superior parlourmaid. This latter's very apron and cap expressed disapproval.

"Can I be of any assistance, madam?"

Peggy brushed past.

"I know my way, thank you!" she said, and plunged into the kitchen.

There a large, red-faced woman, seated at a corner of the table, first stared and then slowly got up to her feet, noisily breathing outraged dignity. There was a powerful smell of buttered toast and Indian tea in the atmosphere.

"I beg your pardon!" panted Miss Morgan, her eyes roaming disconsolately.

"Begging yours, I'm sure, miss," said the new cook in tones of sarcasm.

"I'm looking for Nanny," said the intruder.

"The old housekeeper, miss, if that's what she is?" The scorn deepened. "She'll be apt to be in the housekeeper's room; and, I'll be bound, the girl with her, that ought to be doing her work. Begging your pardon, miss"—the woman proceeded in civiler accents, as Peggy, with a little air of dignity she could very well assume, prepared to withdraw—"I never was one to intrude myself, but if you happen to know when her ladyship, Lady Caerleon, is likely to be home, I'd be thankful if you'd mention it, seeing as her ladyship engaged me for this queer place, and it being my intention to give a month's notice, I'd like to inform her ladyship."

"You'd better write to Penpergan," said Peggy loftily, and shut the door between them.

She hastened towards the housekeeper's room. Apparently the new regime was not working comfortably downstairs either. How would it be with Nanny?

She quailed before the thought—Nanny, who had been so antagonistic from the beginning.

Mrs. Price received her visitor with all decorum. She and Madlen and Boulotte had been likewise partaking of afternoon refreshment, seated round the table, Boulotte in a high nursery chair. A roaring fire, an odorous paraffin lamp and close-drawn curtains had combined to produce that stuffy warmth of atmosphere which is the ideal of servant comfort. The three were apparently extremely content with each other's society, and old Nanny dropped her curtsies and expressed the usual gratification at the young lady's appearance and interest in the health of her family, as though David's marriage had not lain between them. Presently, however, the visitor's request to carry off Boulotte was made the pretext for eliminating the smiling inquisitive presence of Madlen.

"There's ashamed I am of you, Madlen! Take Bullet this minute and wash her face, and put a clean cap on her, for goodness' sake, and make her fit to go upstairs with the young lady. Indeed, yes; she's had her tea, Miss Morgan, and plenty of it. Though what the poor innocent is always wanted for up there—Begone this minute, Madlen!"

The old woman's eye was so severe, she folded her arms with such a gesture of determination, that Peggy saw the door close upon the good-natured underling and the cheerful pauper baby with a sinking spirit. She had come down to find out; she felt she must know; but now that it came to the point, she shrank from the menace of the revelation.

Nanny uncrossed her arms, and began to smooth her apron with trembling hands. Peggy's fascinated gaze followed the signal. Then courage being, after all, not the least of her characteristics, she plunged straight into the heart of the trouble.

"Oh, Nanny, what's wrong here?"

"What's wrong, Miss Morgan, and there's strange it is that a young lady should be asking such questions of a poor servant like me—wrong, did you say, Miss Morgan? Is it the opinion of a poor servant which was never asked for, whatever, nor thought of at the beginning that you're wanting to have now, when there's too late it is for anything but sorrow."

"Oh, Nanny, don't be angry! And do stop calling me Miss Morgan! I—what's happened? Everything looks so strange. I'm frightened. Isn't David happy? I only wanted his happiness!"

"The master's happiness! Did you say his happiness, Miss Peggy, *bach*?" The old woman laughed terribly. "There's happiness the white-faced idolatrous strange woman would be like to bring to any decent house, much less Treowen! I'm not blaming you, Miss Peggy. Indeed no; no, nor the master either. It's a spell she's cast on you both. We've the Bible word for it: there are witch-women. It's the shadow she brought into this house from the moment she crossed the threshold; it's the shadow she's cast across my master's heart."

"Oh, Nanny, don't! What is it? I can't understand."

"There's things you'd best not understand, whatever."

"But, why? Why?"

Nanny clapped her hands together.

"Ah! you'd ask yourself that, Miss Peggy, *bach*, if you'd heard the master walk the hours through in his room these nights past—there's lonely! It would break your heart."

Peggy grew white, her eyes filled with tears. The sense of the mystery of life, the apprehension of things gravely, yet intangibly wrong between these two whom

she had brought together filled her with a kind of nightmare fear. "Isn't she good to him? Doesn't she love him? Don't they love each other?" The words trembled on her lips, but some shy instinct held them back. Boulotte was now shouting in the passage. Hurriedly Peggy made her escape. There was a vindictive triumph about Nanny, even in her wrath, almost as if she were glad that the strange woman should have brought misfortune instead of blessing to Treowen.

The same note of inexplicable malice was audible in the comments which Madame de Tirlemont and her cousin freely made as they all drove home through the cold mists of the December night.

Lady Celia was very silent. Peggy sat with clenched teeth: the waters of desolation had closed about her and were flowing in upon her soul, icily chill as never before. Her grief for Johnny had been first a despair, then an exaltation, and then a long ache; but there had been something vital, high and splendid about it, even at her worst moments. Now all was failure and misery. She had set herself one task to accomplish: to make "Johnny's brother" happy and lift the hopes of Treowen. Her success had turned into disaster. She could not understand; she could not measure the extent of it.

The little foreign women exchanged lively converse in a high key as the car whirled homewards sheathed in its own vivid light.

"One hardly needed to ask why Mr. Owen makes himself no longer nursed by that dear Vivianne," Madame de Tirlemont remarked, with her flat laugh. "Didst thou perceive how I supported thee? Thou hadst a famous *toupet*, all the same, to come and yap thy little questions at that big gentleman, Jeanne!"

"*Et avec ça!* Thou wast not yapping thyself, perhaps! He put thee very well back in thy place, it struck me."

"You, too, were put back in your place. Do not forget that."

"Oh, I bear him no malice! What could he say, the unfortunate? I never expected him to announce in so many words: 'Dear cousin of my wife, we are not getting on at all. And since it is so, I get myself nursed at the hospital.'"

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Madame de Tirlemont dramatically. Peggy thought she had never seen two creatures so fond of what in her nursery days used to be called play-acting. "Do you really think it is as bad as that? All the same, *cela me fait de la peine*, I never raved of thy Vivianne; but surely it is not possible that she could have the inhumanity to refuse herself to such a little service."

"She's capable of anything," said Madame Hollebeke. "But it strikes me that it is he that is refusing. He seems to me a proud man, that Mr. Owen."

"Certainly things seem to be going *au plus mal*," summed up the other contentedly. "The fault is hers, of course. What an adorable house!"

"Adorable!" said Madame Hollebeke, yawning. "A little sad perhaps!"

"Sad—after seven days?"

"But if one does not agree! It is not I who would care to live there, I admit, with that severe Englishman, and *la bambine* for all company."

"Ah, that little Boulotte! That is a queer little body; but she is gay, anyhow. *En parenthèse*, my dear, did you notice the way she ran to Mr. Owen—the way he looked at her? One would say he adored her, under his Britannic coldness."

"At least he will have that," said Madame de Tirlémont enigmatically.

Lady Celia yawned and bent forward.

"Would you mind my openin' the window a little? It is perfectly stiflin' in here."

"If you are not afraid of the damp," said Madame Hollebeke doubtfully.

"Anythin's better than stiflin' or bein' poisoned," drawled Lady Celia. And Madame Hollebeke, who was swift to take umbrage, fell into a sulky silence, convinced that her hostess had meant the remark symbolically.

After her guests had departed, Vivianne felt unable to remain in the oak parlour watching David and Boulotte together. It had become the order of things, evening after evening, that he should sit on the hearth and patiently attempt to build houses of bricks for Boulotte to knock down with shrieks of laughter before they were half completed.

She went up to her room and tried to think of some occupation for herself; but she could neither read nor sew. It was impossible to escape from thought. She had seen herself and David through the eyes of her visitors. She had been aware of the anguish of doubt in Peggy's questioning gaze, and of the suspicious aversion in Lady Celia's. Her own compatriots had not been able to hide their mischievous amusement. To them that ordinary trick of fate—an ill-assorted couple—was apparently a very good joke.

She sat on the tapestry couch, staring at the faded, eager chase on the wall before her. Like that hunted stag, she seemed to be, as it were, arrested in a flight of mortal anguish, the hounds of fate at her heels, the

death-blast in her ears, without hope of release. She could neither turn and give battle, nor seek refuge in flight. . . . She must stay and endure the unendurable doom; pursued, not overtaken; threatened, not stricken. In her isolation with this one man, who had cut her from his life and yet kept her beside him, the silence and loneliness of the old house in its great circle of woods had pressed upon her till she had feared for her own sanity. Now, however, that she had seen herself and him mirrored in their unnatural disjointedness in other people's minds, she knew that it was in company that her misery must wear its most unbearable aspect.

Aimlessly she began to pace the room; then the inner disquietude turned her thoughts downstairs again. Boulotte was there. Some fibre in the unacknowledged depths of her nature stirred and yearned over the child. The very presence of that innocence had in it something soothing. To Boulotte she was only *la belle dame*; to those guileless eyes she was someone protective and kind and natural—not Vivianne the hunted and haunted; not Vivianne the reprobate; not the anomalous, enigmatic, the ill-chosen Mrs. Owen, the woman in the wrong place, bound by fate where her presence was resented.

Driven downstairs again by the new mood, she went back to the oak parlour; but on the threshold she halted and stood staring. David, seated in the deep arm-chair, held the child in the crook of his left arm. Both were asleep. Of Boulotte's face she could but see the rounded, rosy outline, like a cherub's profile, wrapt into the business of repose with frowning intensity. David's head was bent a little forward, his worn countenance had a look of peace that she had never yet beheld there.

An extraordinary thought shimmered upon her brain

and was gone. "If things had been different, and I had loved David, and he were holding our child, how sweet it would have been!" She slipped out of the room again and up to her own, and flung herself face downwards on the bed. And the tears came—blinding, blinding, bitter and unrelieving.

After the flash of light, darkness had rolled back upon her soul.

CHAPTER VI

Reviling, Curses: Ill-Counsel

It was five days before Christmas, and even Tre-owen in this year of war, stricken by sorrow for the dead and blighted by the perverse folly of the living, could not evade the traditional and distinctive amenities of the season. The gardener brought in armfuls of holly, ivy and mistletoe; and Jessie wreathed the boughs on the top of the pictures, round the brass chandeliers, about the morion of the David Owen who had sallied forth from Plymouth with Drake, and the casque of the cavalier David who had ridden with Prince Rupert.

Christmas is a time of special solemnity to the Pole, as well as to the English; and Vivianne, perhaps to cheat remembrance, perhaps also from some spring of youthful vitality as yet unconquered by fate, had a sudden fancy for consecrating the festival in the only manner endurable in the circumstances. She would create a feast of joy for Boulotte.

She was trying to make the little creature understand the treat in store for her—sitting beside her, like a child herself, before the fire in the oak parlour—when Jessie came flouncing in upon them.

With the air of one doing her duty, no matter with what result, she requested her mistress to be so good as to come into the kitchen “to stir the pudding—it being the custom in England, madam, if you please.” Vivianne was glad—when she found that David was

also expected to be at the ceremony—that she had brought Boulotte down with her. The only times when their relations with each other approached the endurable to her mind was when the child was between them.

The cook greeted them volubly, and proceeded to enlarge on the inevitable inferiority of a pudding prepared such a short time in advance, her trivial, searching gaze the while roaming from one to the other of the masters with undisguised inquisitiveness. It was obvious that the unhappy situation was well known and discussed in kitchen regions. She clacked her tongue over the master's left-handed condition. "It turned her heart on her," she averred, "a fine gentleman like him!" If there was anny thing anny day she could do for him at anny time, she'd do it on her bended knees, as annybody would that had the feelings of a woman at all!

Vivianne fled from the kitchen as soon as she could, leaving Boulotte behind her. Her own conscience echoed the reproach of the oblique accusation: anyone with the feelings of a woman! In this house everyone blamed her; did she not deserve it? In the hall she paused, waiting for David to pass through again on his way to his study. How much she wished that she had not thought of this plan, but she could not now disappoint Boulotte. He looked surprised to see her lying in wait for him, and forestalled her with the question:

"Is there anything you wish to say to me?"

"I would like to drive to Gwent-Town," she answered. "Is it possible? Is there anything to take me?" She hesitated; a fierce flush dyed her face as she went on: "You will want the dog-cart to take you to the hospital, I suppose?"

After that first scrutinising glance he had averted

his eyes; and, as he did not now immediately reply, she floundered into miserable explanation :

"It was for little Boulotte—to give her a Christmas tree—but it doesn't matter. It's not of the least consequence. She's probably forgotten all about it. I'd really rather not."

"No, don't say that." He turned away from her still more, and it seemed as though he, too, had some difficulty in speaking. "It is a very kind thought. There will be no difficulty at all. As a matter of fact"—her gaze was desperately fixed upon him, as if somehow this trivial occasion was assuming the disproportionate aspect of a crisis between them, and she saw how the slow red mounted to his forehead—"as a matter of fact," he repeated, and his voice took a hard note, "there is a vehicle at your disposition now and always—a motor-car. I had ordered it"—he drew his breath in sharply—"a little while ago. It only arrived yesterday."

She understood; in every fibre she felt the chivalrous tenderness, the loving preparedness which she had flung back at him. Impulsively she put out her hand.

"Oh, David!—"

He moved away from her touch, looking at her full to mark his deliberation; then he said indifferently :

"Don't imagine it's anything very magnificent. But it will take you about right enough. The chauffeur has been recommended to me as a careful driver."

"Mustn't I thank you, then?"

Her voice shook, there was a lump in her throat. He had brought her pride very low; but for the first time she felt humbled, not resentful.

"No."

The word struck her like the cut of a whip. He turned from her and walked away. She stood staring after him. It was as if she had had one blinding glimpse of the inner man, found there a fire of passion which, had he let it loose upon her, would have devoured all her angers, her revolts and self-centering emotions like so many straws. She divined how the iron barrier of his pride stood between her and that passion. Dizzily she returned to the oak parlour and sat down to think. But she could not think; she felt herself helplessly drifting like a dead leaf in the wind; she, who had so fiercely willed, so determinedly stood apart, was conscious of a dreadful longing to cling, to be caught, to be held.

Julie came in, expansive, as always.

"I said I would tell madame. The new automobile of madame is at the door. If madame is going to the town, will she permit me to accompany her? I have some little shoppings that press—the ribbons for the linen of madame, and everything for the work-box, and——"

"It is well—you can come," interrupted Vivianne.

She rose and went to get out the cheque-book. Lady Caerleon, who had taken pleasure in preparing the bride for her new duties, had taught her how to draw a cheque, and explained all the ways of English money. Vivianne did not want to touch her allowance; she did not want to drive in the new car. All her zest for the little Christmas feast had turned to revulsion, but she had to go on. It was not enough that she should be punished by David's generosity; she was forced to make use of them.

Julie had never found her mistress disposed to affability, but, as she sat demurely opposite to her while they sped along the country road, she said to herself—for she had a coarse wit of her own—"Madame

looks not only as if she were dead, but as if she were damned ! ”

The thought in Vivianne's mind was indeed a burning torment : “ He will not let me take his hand, and I must take his money ! ” Thus low had the wheel of fate flung her from the height of scorn in which she had vowed that if he touched her she would kill herself !

Upon reaching Gwent-Town she found, after some fruitless seekings, a doll and a Teddy bear at a stationer's shop ; but this superior establishment disclaimed all such petty wares as go to Christmas-tree decoration. She was directed to a large composite emporium known as “ The Gwent and County Stores. ” Here, disgusted by the spectacle of the crowd and confusion within, she ordered Julie to complete the purchases, and declared that she herself would wait in the car.

She was lost in abstraction, staring out unseeingly at the busy coming and going of the country-town folk, when she heard her name called, and Peggy suddenly looked in upon her through the open window.

“ Vivianne ! Fancy meeting you here ! ”

“ I motored in, ” said the other, stupidly.

“ You've got your new car then. Yes, I know. David told me. ” Peggy's manner was abrupt ; her eyes were inimical ; she seemed ill at ease. One moment she looked as if she would dive away into the shop without further speech, the next she appeared to come to a swift, fierce resolve. “ Let me get in a minute ; there's something I must say to you. ”

She opened the door of the car, and sprang in without waiting for a reply. Then, seating herself opposite Vivianne, and looking her straight in the eyes :

“ What have you done to my David ? ” she cried.

"I—I don't know what you mean." Vivianne blanched and shrank away.

"Oh, you know very well ! My Johnny's brother ! Have you no heart at all ? I didn't think you were like that, or I wouldn't have done it. . . . David, the best, the most generous ; there never was such a man ! He loved you. David loved you."

"Peggy, stop ! I cannot listen to this."

"I will not stop ; you must listen. There was not anything good enough for you in his eyes. He couldn't, in his darling soul, think of a single thing that he would not have been ready to do for you. He would have laid down his life for you. No woman in the world ever had a more precious happiness for the taking. That's what I gave you. And you—you—" She broke off in the height of her passionate indictment, and stared at the tragic, guilty face in front of her, her eyes filling with tears. Then she went on with a catching breath : "I suppose you couldn't forget that—that other !"

Vivianne did not answer ; her eyes fell. Peggy's soul blazed out at her, condemning, innocent and severe. After a moment of silence, Peggy got out of the car and shut the door with elaborate quietness ; then, standing on the pavement, made a final remark in a low, bitter voice :

"It is a thousand pities you couldn't marry that other ; you were well matched !"

For the second time that day Vivianne felt as if she had been struck.

When she re-entered Treowen she found that David had gone out, leaving word that he might be detained late. With the sensation that had pursued her all day, of being driven by a force outside herself, she went

docilely at Jessie's summons into the Chinese room to the solitary lunch she must at least pretend to eat, and then back again to the oak parlour to await the coffee which she would have to bring herself to drink. As Jessie withdrew, with her founce of perspicacious disapproval, Vivianne, seized with a terror of the long, empty hours before her, asked to have Boulotte brought up to her. In due time the child appeared, conducted by Nanny herself.

The old woman closed the door behind her and came forward, her pale eyes, always weirdly brilliant in the wizened face, fixed with an ominous intentness on the unwelcome mistress of Treowen. She began, nevertheless, respectfully :

"Begging your pardon, ma'am, for presuming, but the young woman is not too careful of the child, whatever, and there's slippery the stairs are, with the polishing that has been done of late, so I made bold enough to bring Bullet myself."

"Thank you very much ! " said Vivianne. She held out both her hands to Boulotte, who approached reluctantly, stopping to stare round the room for David, with a drooping lip and wide, tearful eyes. The child was in an unwontedly cross humour, for she had been pounced upon in the yard in the midst of an entrancing game of hide-and-seek with the new chauffeur, forcibly washed and conveyed upstairs in spite of protest.

Vivianne wished Nanny would go. Why did she remain standing like that, *cette vieille* ? . . . Why was she glaring at her ? It was absurd, but she felt frightened.

"*Viens, Boulotte, viens, ma petite.*" To cover her sense of discomfort, she tried to coax the child, speaking softly.

Nanny's gnarled hands had been tremulously tor-

menting her apron. She now lifted them and shook them menacingly.

"Your spells will not reach the innocent ! Has not the Lord said their angels always see the face of My Father ? Is not the master of this house enough for you ? Is it not enough for you to see him wasting away hour after hour ?" Whether it was Nanny's frenzied air, or the white terror on Vivianne's face, her own fretful mood, or the mere sense of wrath in the air which children are quick to apprehend, Boulotte began a dismal cry, and running back to her familiar attendant buried her head in her skirts. Nanny put one of the gesticulating hands protectively on the little capped head, and went on : "*Wel-y-wir*, I warned the master. 'There's woe you're bringing into Treowen with the strange woman !' I said to him. But you'd bewitched him, same as you bewitched little Miss Peggy. Indeed yes, yes ; you, and such as you, are born to bring evil ; for there's evil you are, and evil wherever you are ! Well might the Scripture say, thou shalt not bring one that is a witch into thy house ! *Ach y fi*, there's sad enough it was Treowen before you came, and broken were our hearts for the young life taken from it ! But there was peace, indeed, yes. And it was the will of God, whatever, that was being done in the house, for all the great sorrow. But it was the will of Satan brought you here, and there's Satan's work you're doing here. It's my master's heart you're eating out of his body. You will never have the soul of him, but his heart and his life you're eating out of him bit by bit !"

She bent and painfully lifted the child into her arms ; and between rocking and soothing, cried to her stricken listener :

"It's between him and you : there's one of you must die of it !"

Staggering, she carried her burden out of the room. And, as if through the closing of waters about her head, Vivianne heard vaguely Boulotte being set down on her feet again; heard the sound of her small, uneven tread, and her uplifted piping voice growing ever fainter down the passage beside the old shuffling tread.

CHAPTER VII

The Man, the Hour, and the Storm

THOUGH it was still early in the afternoon, streaks of yellow shone between the massed grey clouds in the western horizon. Round the stone gables there was a hum of wind, and the old weathercock in the stable-yard swung frantically between west and north. Sniffing the air, David's shepherds presaged snow.

Vivianne had little thought of the weather as she flung on the fur-lined wrap and the winged fur cap, which were still lying on her bed in her room where she had thrown them on her return that morning. She had but one idea: to get out under the wide sky, into the woods and fields; she cared not whither, so long as it was away—so long as she was free of the house that oppressed and rejected her.

She was just about to open the door and hurry forth, when Jessie appeared, with an unwonted look of excitement and a new air of amiability.

"If you please, madam, there's a gentleman asking for you."

"For me?"

"Yes, madam, he's waiting in the oak parlour."

"Who is it? I don't know anyone."

"I couldn't catch his name, madam."

Hitherto Vivianne had had no visitors; but, of course, she must expect them to begin to appear. She thought of Lord Penpergan; then of the little dark Mr.

Williams, with the angry eyes under the grey hair, who had been David's best man. She was annoyed but hardly interested; yet, on the threshold of the oak parlour she hesitated, a sense of doubt, an inexplicable feeling that in there some new turn of her dark fate awaited her, came over her. She opened the door. A man was standing in the oriel, looking out. The bleak light caught the flung back waves of golden hair, the curve of a white forehead.

He turned swiftly at the sound of her entrance. It was Ladislas Orlenski. Then she knew that she was not surprised. She was not surprised, but an indefinable emotion seized her; she felt as if she had been caught in a fierce, hot wind; as if every atom of her being, every thought and feeling, were eddying in giddy spirals. She knew, however, that she was advancing towards him. She heard herself say: "You? You?" And her voice sounded calm and untroubled. Then both her hands were taken in that well-remembered grasp, and those eyes that had haunted her so long were plunging into hers.

With a shock the world ceased to spin, and her soul with it; to her own amazement she found herself composed, almost indifferent. She drew her hands from those long white fingers, and said briefly:

"Why have you come?"

His light, upturned moustache quivered as he smiled.

"My little cousin—my dear little cousin, you told me I would rejoice in your happiness; you wrote me that, did you not?"

"Yes, I wrote you that."

"And now, I am here to see for myself."

"Look and see for yourself, then."

He gave her a lightning glance; a flickering smile came and went on the full lips, the sensuous curves

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and colour of which were in curious contrast with the delicate chiselling of the face and its clear pallor. Claspings his hands behind his back, he began leisurely to stare round the room.

"I see, for one thing, that you, a jewel, are charmingly set, *ma petite Vivianne*. There are, here, things of very great beauty—marvels, some of them!"

He went over to the chimneypiece, stood with his back to it, and stared across the room at the Van Dyck, dim and rich—the stripling Owen of Charles I.'s court. "That's a great picture!"

The mocking tone had a subtle alteration as though art, to the speaker, had been religion. Vivianne sat down and turned aside; she could not look at him there where David always stood.

Slowly he started to walk round the room, dropping comments as he went. "That bureau is a marvel—*pur dix-septième, ma foi!* . . . I would give a year's income to find velvet of that shade of red curtains for my palace in Venice; but like the turf of the Oxford college they speak of, it would take three hundred years to produce."

He had reached the oriel, and stood once more contemplating the wild wintry landscape without. "Old—old and untouched! The same little panes, through which the ancestors gazed—and, withal, impoverished." He stepped down into the room towards her. "It adds a charm for me. Perhaps less for you. But, bah, it's all a fairy tale! And you, there, the enchanted princess. *On dirait*, by the way, scarcely so enchanted!" He laughed lightly. "Shall rather we say bewitched? Why do you sit with your back to the light like that? Have you forgotten already that I have come to see how happy you are? Will you not rise, my cousin, and let me look into your face?"

She got up and stood before him.

"Look, then, and see how happy I am!" she said for the second time.

The gaze of his too brilliant eyes—pale blue, restless under the prominent bar of the brow—enveloped her, searched, seized. It was a gaze at once caressing and violating. It was ardent and it was cruel. Joy flashed into it.

"You are very unhappy."

"That seems to please you."

"It ravishes me. It is all my desire. You have remained mine, and I claim you. It is for that I am here. You are coming with me."

"You are mad."

"No, I am sane. It is the highest sanity. When two love each other, they belong to each other. Your poor little letter! You don't know all it told me."

"What did it tell you?"

"How much you wanted me. Oh, you are adorable! Anger and pride, in you, it is all melody—and it is all mine. By and by I will have another melody. That will be"—he closed his eyes a moment and his voice dropped—"that will be rapture! Everything is as I wish. Sorrow and love and anger, they have made of you the perfect one—for me! In your great white furs, in your winged hat, in the shadow of your sunset hair, with that white face of yours, strange and passionate, luminous like a crescent moon, so angry—so adorably angry, so absolutely mine, I claim you. I have come for you."

The past and its overwhelming emotions rose like a wave, caught her and flung her whole being towards him. She held herself back with clenched hands. But there were traitors within her citadel—weariness, hunger for love, misery, loneliness, wounded pride. Here was one who loved her, and here was escape, here was the voice of a lost delight calling her! It was her own fair

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life that claimed her again, her home, her youth out of the land of strangers, her kin, the comrade of her childhood—all that had once been natural and joyous and beloved and her own!

He had said he was ravished; and as he gazed on her, more and more his look became enkindled.

"Nothing could have kept me from you, Vivianne. Your beauty draws me with a single hair—ah! your wonderful hair! No one ever had hair like you. It has indeed drawn me. You are bound to me with your hair."

Not knowing what she said, she exclaimed:

"It is Pelléas, after all!"

"Oh, you are exquisite!" Very gently he laid his hands on her shoulders. "Mélisande, let us go out of the house of Golaud."

"I cannot!" she breathed.

"You do not love him."

His voice, too, had fallen so low that it was wellnigh nothing but a caress. It seemed to be laying hold of her heart.

"Love, love?" she repeated. "I don't know. There has been no love in this house; nothing but anger and hatred."

He laughed in triumph.

"Then what keeps you? Then you are free!"

"I don't know."

"It is fear. You are afraid of this man—of Golaud!"

"Do you mean David? I am not afraid of him. It is of the vow, the vow at the altar."

"Bah—the vow! Words, that have no meaning."

"He said: 'It shall be neither broken nor kept.' That was our compact."

"Vivianne, what are you saying! Come! Come out of this cold land of exile, out of this cold house, away from this cold man that you are afraid of! My

God! he brought your beauty home, and you made a compact!"

When he said that it seemed to Vivianne that her heart was stabbed through and through.

"It was my fault!" her voice wailed.

His grasp dropped from her shoulders to her hands. He pressed them and kissed them.

"Could any man who loved you let you go! Could any man not love you!"

"You let me go!"

"I was in the arms of another mistress. But you and she—music and you are the same to me now—you and she are one! You are living music to me. I shall weave my themes out of your hair, your eyes shall shine through my song, your lips shall enchant the world. I shall never hold my art but through you. Come, come now!"

He wanted her—and in this house she was not wanted. . . . David had withdrawn from the touch of her hand—and to this man she was life and art, love and inspiration!

"I will come," she said suddenly.

It was like the cry of an escaping bird. She wrested her hands from his clasp, and rushed to the door. His eyes were aflame with triumph.

"I will be in the car," he called after her. "Ready to start. I am driving myself."

He ran down the stairs, light-footed and swift like some creature of the woods. There was no one in the great hall. Hastily he slipped on his sable-lined coat, flung the cap on his head, and stepped out through the porch. There he saw that snow was beginning to fall in rare flakes. Opening the car, he seized one of a couple of fur rugs that were folded inside, and cast it on the seat in front. He glanced impatiently into the house, paced up and down once or twice; then, as the

cold air stung him, he thrust his hands into his pockets seeking for his gloves, snapped his fingers irritably and ran back into the house; the gloves had fallen under the table in the hall. As he stooped to pick them up, he heard Vivianne's step on the stairs. With a low sound of satisfaction he turned, but brought himself up short in his hurried advance and stood staring.

She was in black from head to foot; an ill-fitting rough ulster hung over her shabby skirt and blouse, a black gauze veil was tied round the worn black velvet cap. The wonderful creature of a moment ago, radiant and tragic at once, the princess in her white furs, the strange valkyrie beauty under the white wings, had been replaced by this figure of mourning and poverty.

The glance he now fixed upon her was hard as steel.

"What have you done with yourself?"

"Did you think I could come with you, wearing the gift of another man?"

He was shaken with silent laughter:

"Ah, it is well done! I am not to miss, after all, the little Belgian refugee. Come, come!" He caught her by the arm. "Let us go, quick!"

As he spoke he rushed her out through the porch with an impetus she could not resist.

It was a great white car, of an unusual shape and of extraordinary finish and opulence. The silver fittings shone; through the door, which had swung half open, Vivianne had a vision of white plush, of white fur, of gleaming white silk curtains; she felt herself like a crow against all this delicate splendour.

He closed the door with an irritable movement and leaped into the driver's seat.

"Jump up beside me. Quick, the snow is coming! Let me cover you with the rug—how glad I am to hide away what I can of that dowdy black! . . . You will not

be cold, you are well screened. *Allons!* It goes easy, does it not? A self-starter. *J'ai eu de la chance.* I will tell you about it. Ah, how it hurts me every time I look at you now! My little cousin, that was a bad idea of yours, that of the old garments. I shall go very fast, for I have haste to clothe you again!"

"You need not look at me."

"Perhaps it is as well—*je t'aurais trop admirée.* As you were up in that room, it would have been too distracting!"

The gate that divided the grounds from the drive was open; they sped without halting under the shadow of the oaks. He took the car at such reckless speed down the incline that words were impossible, but presently slackened down as they approached the lodge. A little boy, gaping and blinking against the blast, rushed to open the gates. As the iron clanged behind them, Ladislas brought the car almost to a standstill.

"To the left, is it not?"

"Where do you want to go?"

He laughed.

"To London, I suppose. . . . Through the snow—what an adventure! Ah, if you had worn even your white-winged hat! Shall we not go back for it?"

She shrank from him:

"You are mad!"

"Perhaps I am. I hope so. The sane world is so *assommant*, sane people are so deadly dull! Which way?"

"To the left, then. That leads to Gwent-Town; Gwent-Town is on the road to London."

"Ah—perfect!"

He guided the car through a splendid curve with accelerating speed. As they rushed on again they met the squall; he was still laughing.

"It is amusing! To think of my finding this car all

ready to my hand. Have you noticed the shape? A romance in itself. It is *soi-disant* the Barque of Lohengrin. True, I assure you, *ce n'est pas une blague*. The order of an opera singer—a *beau ténor*—Edgardo Raimondi, no less. You've never heard of him? No matter. He's an American. He had this wonderful thing made with a view to eloping with an Elsa to whom he had sung Lohengrin last year. '*Elsa, io t'amo*' it's written on the panel in front. *Ah, la bonne farce!* his Elsa is now in the heart of Germany, and Edgardo Lohengrin had not enough money after all to pay for his *char d'amour*.—What was that?"

The wind was tearing over the fields, up the valley, bringing the snow upon its angry wing; they were going in the teeth of it at a rate that took their breath away. But, intermingling with the hissing and the roar and the wuthering in their ears, there had come to Vivianne, too, the consciousness as of a wail pursuing them. It had seemed to her as if it was the voice of her own anguish . . . Lohengrin! This man had been the Lohengrin of her dreams!

"Did you hear a cry?" asked Ladislas. "Have we run over anything?"

They were approaching the bridge at a sharp angle and had once more to slow down; but the storm assailing them sideways engulfed them. She could not have answered had she wished. She turned her head away from the blast, and the spectacle that lay before her filled her with a sense of menace and terror. Treowen on its hill, above the bare, dark woods, seemed to be in the centre of the squall. Out of the livid clouds the storm beat round it. But beyond, a yellow gleam between rifted clouds spread across the far distance, and there was serenity. The hills were pencilled against a luminous sky, the cone of Pen-y-fal rose in the midst with an unearthly radiance.

The car wheeled to the left, and they were once more driving headlong into the tempest.

"That is my fate," thought she. "I have brought torment upon the house that sheltered me. I am flying from the light . . . I shall soon be lost in the darkness."

The snowflakes swirled about her white and chill; the thoughts that eddied about her brain were black, and the sting of them burned like wasps. So short a while ago, with what rapture would she not have felt herself flying away into the unknown with her beloved! Why was there anguish upon her heart, a weight of guilt upon her soul? Why did every word he spoke place him more odiously at variance with her? Why did he look at her like that—why did he laugh like that—why was everything he said abhorrent to her? . . . "Have we run over anything?" . . . Yes, indeed, her soul and David's honour! Both were now dead—then why should the wail still pursue her? O God—it was the wail of a child! She shuddered. A fantastic thought seized her: it was the children of Treowen that were crying after them, the children of Treowen they had murdered! . . .

With a suddenness that almost flung her from her seat the man stopped the car.

"*C'est trop fort*," he muttered. "There is positively a child crying somewhere! What the devil can it be?"

The wail rose, distinct and piteous. "*Maman—Maman!*"

"Do you hear it, too, then?" exclaimed Vivianne, her teeth chattering.

Orlenski cast a curse upon the wind, leaped from his seat, stared up and down the road, then violently tore open the door of the car.

"It's in there! What is this bad joke? Yes, it is a child. How did the brat get in there?"

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The superstitious anguish vanished from Vivianne's mind.

"It is Boulotte!" she cried, and sprang down in her turn. "Boulotte, little lamb, little pigeon! How didst thou get there?"

Ladislav, his hand still on the handle of the door, stood gazing into the car. Coming close to him, Vivianne could see, in spite of the gathering dimness, the disgust and fury stamped upon his face. The screams that had been issuing from the open door abruptly fell to whimperings.

"*Belle dame! belle dame!*" sobbed the child in an ecstasy of relief.

Vivianne stooped and picked up the little creature from the rug at the bottom of the car.

"What is this bad joke?" repeated Ladislav acridly. "Great heavens! what a hideous brat! Where does it come from—did you put that baggage in there? No, of course not. It's some silly trick on us."

"Boulotte, my little Boulotte, how didst thou get in there?"

"Boulotte hide," said the child, burrowing her tear-stained face into Vivianne's shoulder.

"She must have crept in. Don't you remember? The door of the car was open when we came out. It was a game, poor baby!"

Orlenski turned away, snapping his fingers.

"Since we have stopped, I may as well light the lamps," he said, over his shoulder.

It did not take him long to accomplish his purpose, for the tenor's car possessed all the latest appliances. As the flare blazed forth cruelly, far down the road, Vivianne, standing with Boulotte in her arms, heard a voice say in her soul, "Behold the way to perdition!"

"*Hé bien,*" said Ladislav. "*Hé bien!* We do not stand here all night, do we? Better get in, it is cold.

Ah, the brat! I was forgetting. What are you going to do with it?"

"To do with it?"

"You do not expect me to run away with that also, I suppose?" he jeered.

He looked extraordinarily handsome and evil, wrapped in his furs, the side-lights of the car catching his keen profile and firing the pale gold of his beard. Tiger and woman! She had once thought there lurked irresistible fascination, adventure and romance in the combination. Now she knew what it meant—a nature at once savage and capricious; a creature to whom love and cruelty were equal pleasure.

"Drop it on the roadside and come!" he said, briefly.

She could not answer; she flung a single glance at him.

"What then?" he went on. "Drop it into some house? They would not take it from us!"

"It is you who are making a bad joke."

"Far from it, my lovely cousin. I never was less amused in my life."

"If you will turn and go back——"

"Go back?"

"A few miles or so—there is a place in the village where—I could leave her."

He stood staring at her; the end of his moustache twitched upwards as he smiled mockingly.

"And, in the end, what is it?" he asked. "Where does it come from—the little frog? It is a pauper child, that."

"Yes," said she, "a pauper, like me—a refugee, like me—a victim bereft, like me."

"It has every look of it," he said impatiently.

She felt that his disgust at that moment included them both. The whole romance of her life withered

away before her. Her love, her illusion, her frantic childish dream—it was all wasted, like white ash, when the fire dies down! She saw him no longer handsome, no longer conquering: only mean, remorseless, destroying. A mask of beauty with the face of a devil behind it; a cavern clothed with sweet flowers in which dwelt a snake. She thought of David, and her heart grew cold. Ladislas gave a wild laugh.

"Get in, then, you and your imp! Which way do I go when we are back over the bridge?"

"Go straight on," she said tonelessly. "The way we came. I will stop you."

She stumbled in, the child in her arms, and he slammed the door upon them. She sat, still grasping Boulotte in the padded luxury of the car, while the little creature sleepily murmured to herself and played with the buttons of the shabby ulster.

He backed and veered the car with a fierce disregard of safety and a perilous loss of temper. But he had the habit and skill which becomes a second nature, and soon they were skimming up the road again. In a few minutes they were across the bridge, and the head-lights began to run white along the snow-beaten hedges of Treowen Park. In a few minutes more, between high walls, the gates would leap out of the gathering gloom. She bent forward, watching. A great decision was taking shape in her mind. "Now," she said to herself, "now!"

She put Boulotte on the seat beside her and tapped at the window pane in front. He looked over his shoulder and the car ground to a standstill. She had already opened the door, there was not an instant's delay in her leaping out. Then she lifted the child into her arms again. He did not attempt to alight, but sat and looked at her curiously.

"Be quick, it's cold," he said. His gaze suddenly

widened and shot fire at her. "*Quand même*, thou art beautiful, even in the old black. I will have no one but thee!"

"Wait, then," she said, "wait for me." Her voice had a strange, deep note, as of exultation and menace mixed.

In those few seconds, during which she had stood still, the squall had plastered her with white. The child complained in her arms; she turned and staggered, half running, driven by the blast. Panting and straining, she reached the lodge gates, found the side wicket and dragged herself and her burden in. There she stopped and drew breath. In the shelter of the wall she was out of reach of the rush of wind, but, far more—oh, how far more truly!—in shelter from the tempest of evil that had assailed her spirit. Upon this relief, however, terror quickly succeeded. The tiger! She was his prey! He would follow, seize her. How could she fly from him, how escape, burdened as she was by the child?

Boulotte again raised a wailing protest.

"Oh, hush—hush, my lamb! Boulotte must be good. Boulotte must hide with the *belle dame*, or the wicked man will catch them!"

She turned from the avenue and, with a strength that she afterwards wondered at, scrambled, very slowly and painfully, but still with success, to the top of the bank where the rising woodland dominated the main road. There, in the gloom, she crouched on the ground, clasping and comforting Boulotte, while her gaze plunged through the tree stems towards that stretch of road where the snowflakes gleamed as they crossed the shafts of the car's head-lights.

After what seemed to her an endless time of suspense, she heard his voice call her name, once or twice, in low

accents, then the car creaked and there was the thud of his leap to the ground. She pressed the child's face against her breast to stifle the continued plaint. In spite of the murmur of the storm about her, she could hear the agonised beating of her own heart. Then she started; a loud laugh rushed past her on the wings of the wind, like the flight of a demon, and was lost. Next a stave of song rang out : "*Elsa, io t'amo!*" The high tenor voice, with its indescribable accent of jeering, came, torn, shredded on the blast. She saw the great shaft of light in the road below her flash vertiginously through the darkness, and be engulfed like to some monstrous shooting star; throbbing seized upon the night for one moment, fell away and was lost; and only the wild voices of the elements, the creaking and sighing of the trees, resounded about her. He was gone!

She remained crouching, scarcely daring to believe the evidence of her senses. At last, rising stiffly to her knees, her arms still about Boulotte, she made the sign of the cross.

"My God, I thank Thee!"

It was the first real prayer she had uttered since the Germans had entered Flesselles.

CHAPTER VIII

The Haven and the Wakening

To carry Boulotte and find her way out of the rough ground back to the drive again was a matter of no small difficulty. Now that she knew herself safe from Ladislav, helpless trembling had seized her. The child was a dead weight in her arms, and the darkness under the trees gathered dangerously. But a light from the lodge window guided her; she reached the top of the bank, and contrived the descent without a fall.

Her way was marked by the whiteness of the snow in the open road of the avenue between the black ranks of the oaks. The thought of seeking refuge in the lodge never came to her. She had but one desire—to reach David! It was like turning from hell to heaven to think of David; it was peace, light, comfort, warmth, security, after turmoil, darkness, deathly cold and hideous peril. The wounded man, with his one arm, loomed before her as a tower of strength.

“‘I will arise and go to my father,’” she said to herself confusedly. She was coming back to his house like a child that has strayed.

The drive ran upwards, and was long, and the snow clogged her steps. The cold began to creep towards her heart; Boulotte’s wails had ceased, and Vivianne wondered if they would both be found the next day dead in the snow. As she plodded on, it seemed to her as if every footprint held her back, but there was no fear now upon her.

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She started, to hear, as it were out of another world, shouts ringing from different points in the woods. She tried to call, but her voice scarcely rose above a whisper. Vaguely, in her chilled brain she wanted to rouse Boulotte and get her to cry out, but she found herself unable to do anything but creep on. A light flashed yellow at the turn of the avenue; swinging low, it came towards her. She saw it gleam on a swiftly striding figure, heard a voice — David's voice — calling: "Boulotte! Boulotte!"

He was not looking for her, but for the child! . . . A quick pain roused her numbed senses, followed by a rush of her whole being towards the man to whom she was returning. Ladislas had gazed at the little one with cruel eyes; he had had but one thought—to get rid of it; he would not have cared if he had left it in the snow to perish. But David, wounded as he was, had gone out in the night and the storm to seek and rescue. Oh, David was good! Then there came a lapse upon her consciousness. The next thing she knew was that the light was flashed into her face. She was like one waking from a nightmare.

"Vivianne!"—David was crying, in a voice of anxious surprise. And then: "Thank God! you've found the child!"

He had put the lantern on the ground, and, with a sense of unbelievable comfort she felt his hand, strong and kindly on her shoulder. Warmth ran coursing to her heart. His touch was upon her! The barrier between them was broken!

"Did you know the child was lost? Have you been looking for her long? How did you find her?"

"She found me!" cried Vivianne wildly. Then she broke into a passion of tears, and cast herself with her burden upon his breast. "Oh, I have come back to you, David!"

His arm was round her. She heard him murmur something brokenly about his poor lost lambs. She strained her face dumbly in the darkness towards his, and she felt his kiss upon her lips.

It was the reality of his dream. The pain of his wound under a beloved weight and the joy of his surprised heart commingled into ecstasy! And as Boulotte raised a drowsy, piteous cry between them, for one exquisite second the winter night seemed to him divinely astir with the promise of spring.

• • • • •

"Forgive me. David has forgiven me.—VIVIANNE."

This was the letter that Peggy received on Christmas morning.

She ran to the schoolroom to hide herself away with her own heart. Glad and grateful—yes, she was that—not to have brought sorrow to Johnny's brother, darkness to Treowen! Her tears fell fast; henceforth every joy would come into her life hand in hand with sorrow. She knew that it must be so, and she would not have it otherwise. Here for her alone—joy, heaven-sent and blessed as it was, wore the face of sorrow. Treowen would blossom with a springtime renewed; fresh hopes would arise to fill the gap left by the young life. Johnny's place would be filled everywhere—except in her heart. It was the bitterest draught of death out of the cup of life itself!

So, even while she gave thanks and blessed God, she wept. She had set Johnny's last photograph on the table before her. She kissed and whispered to it, trying to cheat herself into the feeling that his spirit was near.

"Johnny, are you pleased with me? The war has

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not killed everything for Treowen when it killed you !
It was not to be for you and me, my darling ! But
David will be happy there, and see his children's faces.
Are you happy too, from the midst of the triumphant
army—the white-robed army of martyrs ? Do you look
down upon us and understand, Johnny . . . my own
Johnny ? Treowen will live on ! ”

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